

# NOT DO BUT LIVING FROM THE COMPLETED WORK OF CHRIST DONE

*"WITHOUT A DOUBT, THIS BOOK IS GOING TO HAVE A PROFOUND EFFECT ON THE AVERAGE READER. WHILE SOME MAY EXPERIENCE IT AS RADICAL, THIS BOOK BREAKS OPEN THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL."*

ISAK BURGER, PRESIDENT: AFM OF SA

alan platt

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WORK OF CHRIST

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WORK OF CHRIST  
**DONE**

alan platt



*To every Doxa Deo partner  
May you live in the fullness of this  
revelation of the Good News.*



# ENDORSEMENTS

Alan Platt exemplifies the gift of leadership as powerfully as any leader in the church today. In his new book, Alan leads us to freedom by revealing that Christians start their walk with God at the finish line. Performance based, two-faced, ungraced Christianity is debilitating. Our assignment has never been about what we can do for God, but what God can do through us ... if we start at the finish

*– Dr. Ed Delph – NATIONStrategy, Phoenix, Arizona, USA*

The content of the following pages contain simple truth, yet truth so profound it has the capacity to rock your world. You may have been a Christian all of your life, but Alan Platt's words are likely to strike a chord in you that will bring a new harmony to your spiritual walk and song. *Not Do, But Done: Living from the completed work of Christ* is a message of the victory God has already secured for His followers, and your Savior's desire to showcase YOU as a trophy of His grace. I highly recommend this book to every believer and, after reading it, challenge each to pass it on to someone else who may not have any idea of the extent of God's love for them.

*– Keith Boyer – Lead Pastor, 3D Church, Denver*



My friend Alan Platt is changing the country of South Africa! I know; I've seen it firsthand. In this book, Alan does something amazing that nobody does better – he describes the Good News of the gospel in a way that will make you crave it! He is intelligent, passionate, and relevant to every believer. His book will encourage every kind of Christian – dedicated or discouraged – and cause them to fall in love with Christ all over again. If you've ever needed to understand the magnitude of the "Good News" available to you, then this book is for you!

– Rick Bezet – Senior Pastor, New Life Church of Arkansas

Alan Platt and the Doxa Deo movement are known around the world for teaching, living, and modeling principles that bring transformation to every aspect of society. I saw this firsthand in South Africa, and it changed the way I do ministry. This book provides the foundational teaching that has resulted in the reformation of many lives and multiple cities. The Christian world desperately needs this man and his timeless message on the gospel of the grace of God.

– Ron Lewis Sr. – Leader MSNY,  
New York, New York KPIC, Durham, NC

I am so thankful for Alan's influence and friendship in my life. He is a deep well of wisdom and revelation from whom all of us can gain time after time. His understanding of the completed work of Christ will certainly strengthen and empower all of us to live as Jesus meant for us to live.

– Brady Boyd – Senior Pastor, New Life Church,  
Colorado Springs and author of *Sons and Daughters*

I have known Alan Platt for more than 20 years as a man of integrity and authenticity. Apart from being a visionary leader gifted with faith

for city transformation and releasing city-changers, he is an inspiring and gifted teacher of the Word of God. I highly recommend *Not Do, But Done: Living from the completed work of Christ* as a must-read for anyone who is serious about embracing God's destiny of being Christ-like and living a victorious life in the here and now through "the abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness."

– Don Price – Pastor, Restore London.

Alan Platt has one of the sharpest minds and probably the most generous heart I have ever come across in a leader. His love for the Word and the ways of God has been a constant source of inspiration to me in the twenty years of life and ministry that we have shared thus far. As a leader, he has developed the uncanny ability to discern, with a single "taste," the ingredients that have brought about the situation before him. And as a leader, friend, and pastor, he brings the most amazing wisdom to the table, providing clear guidance and strategic steps toward solutions that lead to growth and transformation. In an age where teachers and communicators abound, often contributing more confusion than clarity on the issue of grace, Alan provides us with a landmark work that takes us to the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ ... and then provides a clear, strategic path to the kind of personal and community transformation that comes from embracing that heart. This is one book on grace you will want in your library.

– Rick Moser – Associate Pastor (Worship & Arts/Training),  
*Doxa Deo Brooklyn, Tshwane*

Alan Platt's opening of God's word has not only expanded my understanding of the gospel, it has ignited my interest in personalizing all that is communicated as God's Good News for me. Discovering that I am not an afterthought in God's mind as far as the gospel is concerned changed how I view myself and placed me in a more

intimate, open space of flourishing in the course of living. This book successfully communicates to non-believers, confused believers, and true believers in a manner that will cause all to respond with love and gratefulness. This book is a must-read for all!

– JK Lehoko – *Campus Pastor,  
Raslouw Campus, Tshwane.*

I have known Alan Platt as a friend and coworker in the city of Pretoria for many years. God has given him the unique ability to take a truth and earth it in such a practical, applicable way that it is easily understood. In reading the manuscript of this book, I was reminded of a song we used to sing: “We are complete in Him ... It’s not by works of righteousness but by His grace alone.” This book will encourage you to enjoy the complete and glorious life that the Good News offers to every person who is willing to receive it!

– Nevil Norden – *Senior Pastor at  
Lewende Woord/Living Word, Tshwane*

I commend Alan for articulating the impact of accepting Jesus Christ as Savior in one’s life. He has succeeded in making a clear distinction between salvation and religious practice. The gospel of Jesus is all-sufficient to take care of the sin question as well as its consequences, namely guilt and shame. New life in Christ should be a season of celebrating God’s grace and goodness towards His creation. I fully endorse this book as a must-read for all born-again children of God who want to understand their new identity and position in Christ. Well done, Alan.

– George Mahlobo – *General Secretary AFM of South Africa*

Much of Christian life today is expressed in a language that urges us to serve God with greater devotion. I am so encouraged that this

book does not reflect that understanding. For a post-Christian society like Europe, the news of the completed work of the cross and a liberated life in Christ is truly Good News! Alan Platt is a global leader whose heart has been captured by this revelation, and he masterfully celebrates that understanding in *Not Do, But Done: Living from the completed work of Christ...* no longer self-performing, but participating in what Christ has done for us. Alan leads a movement of socially-committed community leaders whose faith enhances their intelligence and global perspective. The vision for a book about the identity of man, fully restored in Christ, is a natural extension of his commitment to see cities across the globe blessed and local communities transformed.

– Ioannis Dekas – City Leader, Doxa Deo London

Alan Platt's fresh approach to the centrality of grace and the life of believers portrays the finality of our position as believers. His thorough unpacking of Scriptural texts is a road map to the true freedom we have in Christ. Warning! Legalistic, judgmental, and self-righteous individuals should not expect to be pleased with Alan's conclusion. However, if you're tired of trying to be good, worrying about eternity, and earning your way to Christ's love, this book is liberating.

– Rob Hoskins – President, One Hope Inc., Florida USA



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# FOREWORD

I crossed paths with Alan Platt in 1982. It soon became apparent that he was not intended to be a traditional pastor. Here was a natural leader with an exceptional combination of talents, gifts, and personality. He not only had the insight, wisdom, and strategic leadership abilities of someone much older, but he possessed these to such an extent that, with ease and spontaneity he is recognized today as one of the most influential spiritual leaders in the church world in South Africa, and even internationally.

He is the father of the Doxa Deo Network – a church model experiencing unprecedented growth and influence in South Africa, as well as abroad. It is not only his leadership ability that commands respect, but also his exceptional insight into Scripture and the remarkable ability to interpret and articulate essential Biblical truths in a highly comprehensive and effective manner.

This is why the publication of this book is such good news. While I am convinced that there will be many more best-sellers coming from the fruitfulness of his thoughts and heart, this book, *Not Do, But Done: Living from the completed work of Christ*, is an important and significant landmark.



Without a doubt, this book is going to have a profound effect on the average reader. While some may experience it as radical, this book breaks open the heart of the gospel. I found it refreshing to see that the focus was placed uncompromisingly on Jesus Christ once again. The gospel is nothing less, and also nothing more, than Christ Himself.

From the days of the early church, some believers have struggled to understand and accept that Jesus Christ's substitutionary death was all-sufficient. Was it too good to be true, was it too easy, or has the gospel not been understood correctly? In the first decades after Christ's ascension, this was apparently one of the biggest problems Paul had to deal with. It is remarkable how often he refers to this in his letters – especially in Romans and Galatians.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the emphasis on people's sacrifices and their own merits filled the ecclesiastical picture from A to Z. It took the significant breakthrough of Martin Luther and the Reformation to make people get rid of these traditions passed on from their ancestors and to get back to the heart of the gospel – simple faith in Christ.

It is this core truth that Alan Platt exposes and emphasizes in such an exceptional and unique way. It sounds like something new, but is actually an age-old and wonderfully liberating truth.

I believe the most probable effect this book will have on its readers is this: that sincere and genuine believers and seekers will realize that Christ did enough, that He did everything, and that we are able to live from the fullness of this complete work with grateful hearts.

What makes this book such an exceptional read is the contemporary idiom in which it is written. The consistent examples from our modern world make this not a dry, dogmatic document, but an easily- understandable and digestible explanation of the

greatest Truth on earth – that Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to become part of the family of God ... and that this is not our own doing. This book should not leave anyone unchanged.

*– Isak Burger, President AFM of SA*



# INTRODUCTION

**D**id you play the game “Chutes and Ladders”<sup>1</sup> as a child – a game that could frustrate the most unflappable of people? You did your best to climb a few ladders to get to the top of the game board as quickly as possible, only to land on a chute and be sent back down the board from whence you’d come. As a player, you resigned yourself to the disappointment, even after having just celebrated climbing up a winning ladder. You spent the whole game moving up and down until one of the other players finally reached “finish” on the board.

This game is an analogy of the experience many Christians have in their relationship with God. They view the Christian life as an attempt to avoid spiritual chutes (sin) and to climb spiritual ladders (good works and dedication) in order to reach the finish line (heaven).

Lived this way, life becomes an experience of having to do my part and give my best to do everything right and to try not to sin so that I can qualify for heaven. The focus is on arriving at the destination – the square on the board that says “finish” – and that becomes the

---

<sup>1</sup> In South Africa this game is better known as “Snakes and Ladders”.

purpose of the whole game. Things usually run smoothly for a while, and I may even get it right to climb a few spiritual ladders almost right to the top, but before I know it, a chute swallows me up and I end up right at the bottom of the proverbial playing board of life.

If this lighthearted comparison reflects something of your spiritual life, then this book is definitely for you. I want to guide you towards a discovery about the greatest message on earth. This message has the capacity to impact your life and to enable you to discover that God has freed you from a frustrating and futile way of life.

Christianity is definitely not about playing spiritual Chutes and Ladders in the hope of making it to the top to reach the “finish” square. The reality you need to discover is that the starting point of our relationship with Jesus is actually the “finish” square. It is not our final destination because we start at the “finish.”

### **THE STARTING POINT: “IT IS FINISHED”**

Christ has reached the top of the metaphorical Chutes and Ladders board on our behalf. Our spiritual life begins at the FINISH. We start right at the top, at the perfection that Christ has already achieved!

This is the core of the gospel. If you do not begin from this perspective, your Christian life is going to be one long journey of constant frustration. God wants to make known His eternal, unconditional love for us from this starting point. In Christ, we already live right at the top, in the “finish” square, and no chute should ever catch us off guard again. When Jesus cried out, “It is finished!,” we were included in an event that changed our entire existence. Our spiritual journey involves discovering our true identity, and that discovery begins when we discover ourselves in Christ and claim His declaration, “It is finished.” The game is over – we have won!

So many people continue to believe that we are responsible for our own salvation. However, in our fallen state we will never get it

right on our own. We need a Savior! When your walk with God is all about how you try to do everything right to gain His approval and reward, you are going to find yourself constantly struggling with three W's:

Firstly, you muster up all your *willpower* and decide to give your best and always try to do what is required. But before you know it, you do something that you shouldn't and it feels like one of the chutes has swallowed you up. You are so ashamed about your failure that you feel completely condemned. Didn't you promise yourself and God that you would never ever do that again? You soon come to the realization that your willpower is not good enough, and you completely give up. Because of this, you begin to *waver* – you are precarious in your walk with God. One moment you are well on your way to the top of the ladder, the next moment you are right at the bottom and feel far from God.

This results in the third “w”: *worry*. You worry about whether the Lord still loves you and doubt that He really cares about you. You start to feel unsure that the Lord knows about your needs and whether He is going to help you or not because you feel so far from Him. You even begin to worry if you are going to “make it” one day. You despair of ever reaching the top level, let alone getting to the finish square.

When you function in this way, you try so hard to please God and to experience His blessing, but it seems impossible to attain. So you start all over again by scraping the necessary willpower together to begin climbing the ladder of good works again.

## **CRAZINESS**

The Apostle Paul addresses this very issue – the Chutes and Ladders mentality – in most of his letters to the local churches of his time. He found it hard to believe that Christians were trying to do

something that Christ has already done for us, and challenged the church in Galatia about this. *The Message* translation says it well:

*Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren't smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it?*

– GALATIANS 3:3

Craziness! Christianity is not about performing in order to reach a final outcome. God has already rewarded us. Our reward has to do with the fact that we are in Christ: If you are in Christ, there is nothing in this world you still need to do to be rewarded!

But the gospel is unfortunately sometimes presented as something we have to do to receive God's blessing. It is clear in his letter that Paul had reached the point of despair with the people in Galatia. They were playing spiritual Chutes and Ladders and were trying everything in their power to earn God's favor and grace. This is, unfortunately, how many believers still live today.

## **JESUS DID IT ON YOUR BEHALF**

When Jesus died on the cross, He said: "It is finished!"

Our healing and restoration is already guaranteed based on His finished work on the cross. This book is not just another addition to the thousand others out there appealing to you to serve God with more dedication. It is, rather, the opposite: It is the invitation to join me in seeing how great the salvation is that Christ has already accomplished for us. This book is for everyone who wants to put an end to their "Chutes and Ladders" spiritual life, and who desires to live from the declaration Christ has already made over their lives: "It is finished!"

# GOD'S GREAT MYSTERY

**W**hat is the first thing that comes to mind when someone tells you they have good news for you? Are you a little skeptical, expecting it to be followed with a “but ...”? It's like the man who says to his friend, “I've got good news and bad news. The good news is that I bought you a ticket to the World Cup Final. The bad news is that you need to buy your own plane ticket to get there.” That's not entirely good news, is it?

Or if a teacher says to one of his students, “Johnny, you have not been selected for the team that will tour the Cape in July, but the good news is you'll be able to sleep late in your winter holiday,” I don't think Johnny will think this is anything close to good news!

**Good news must be *good* news –  
without buts, hidden agendas,  
or deceptive fine print.**

Good news must be good news – without buts, hidden agendas, or deceptive fine print. Consider the example of a couple I heard about recently. Both of them were already in their thirties when they



got married, and they wanted to start a family immediately. Unfortunately, after many years, she was still unable to get pregnant and they decided to begin in vitro treatments as a last hope of having a baby. After two unsuccessful attempts, they were completely devastated but they decided to go ahead and try the procedure for the third and last time.

The blood tests came back – it was good news and the entire family was overjoyed! Everyone started placing bets on whether it was a girl or a boy and came around to their house with clothes and gifts for the baby. What the couple did not realize was that they had not yet heard the full extent of the good news. On their first visit to the gynecologist, the rest was revealed: the sonar showed two heartbeats and a few months later they were the proud parents of a healthy baby boy and a healthy baby girl!

In the same way, the gospel is good news in the purest sense. There are no “buts” involved. The word “gospel” comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “God’s good news.”

What does the gospel mean to you? It is interesting to hear people’s varied responses to this question. Some are extremely vague and refer to forgiveness of sins or the idea that God does not punish us for our sins. For others, the crux of the gospel is escaping hell, and as a reward we get to go to heaven. None of these answers offer much freedom.

Some people aren’t excited about the gospel because they feel judged by it. Instead of being happy, they feel guilty and ashamed. Many people experience the church as a place where their guilt is exposed and where they feel ashamed of everything they’ve done wrong. They think it’s a place where you always need to put your best foot forward and look as devout as possible. If that’s the case, it doesn’t sound like the gospel is good news at all!

Some people think the gospel is only intended for certain peo-

ple: your race, language, or church denomination can disqualify you from benefiting from it. But if certain people are excluded from the gospel, for whatever reason, it isn't really good news, is it? How can it possibly be good news if it doesn't benefit you?

The essence of the gospel for many people is the forgiveness of sins and the fact that God no longer punishes us for our trespasses. Paul agrees that this is definitely part of the gospel, but there is so much more to it than this. Ephesians 1:7 states it so clearly: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ..." Yes, we are eternally grateful that God has forgiven us our sins in Christ! But we limit ourselves if we believe that's where it ends. Paul continues to motivate us to gain insight into the fullness of this gospel:

*... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.*

**- EPHESIANS 1:17-18**

Is it possible that the gospel's true message has been lost somewhere along the way? Is it possible that the church is no longer the bearer of Good News? That is the purpose of this book – for us to discover and truly understand exactly what the gospel is all about.

## **THE GOSPEL IS REVEALED TO YOU**

There was once a man named Saul, a Jew and an advocate of the Pharisaic law. He was just a young boy when he was first introduced to the study of Mosaic Law. By approximately the age of thirteen, he was a committed and gifted student of Gamaliel, one of the

most highly respected Rabbis in the history of Judaism. Judaism is primarily based on the law God gave to Moses. For a Jew, fulfilling this law is the greatest and most fundamentally important thing you can ever do. So that was Saul's passion in life – obeying every facet of the law and persecuting those who did not uphold the law.

Saul was there at the stoning of Stephen, the very first Christian martyr. Scripture tells us that Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and power; he was also a leader in the New Testament church. What was Stephen's crime that warranted him being stoned to death? He told people that it was no longer necessary to try to uphold the law in order to be saved. He told people there was only one way to be saved, and that was to believe in Jesus Christ. In short, Steven preached the gospel. For Jews, including Saul, any preaching that exalted Jesus Christ above the Law of Moses was totally taboo. This is why they so passionately persecuted the early New Testament Church.

One day, Saul approached the high priest and asked that letters be sent out to all the synagogues in Damascus. These letters requested the help of all the synagogues to locate and capture anyone belonging to the New Testament church and to bring them back to Jerusalem. But while Saul was on his way to Damascus to execute his persecution plan, he had a radical encounter.

*As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."*

**- ACTS 9:3-5**

Saul, who later became known as the apostle Paul, had an encounter with Jesus Christ that day and received the revelation of the

gospel. This revelation awakened a hunger in him to know more about this good news. He discovered that God had intervened in the fate of humanity and that he, Paul, was included in that. He realized that the inclusion of man in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ cancelled the consequence of the fall of man. After his conversion Paul spent three years in the Arabian Desert, where God revealed to him the full message of the gospel.

Paul spoke of this revelation in his letter to the church in Galatia, when he told them that this good news was not thought up by people. He assured them that he did not merely learn of it from a person, but that Jesus Christ revealed it to him in person (see Galatians 1:11–12).

The gospel is something which is revealed to you by the Spirit of God. It is in one sense a secret; a kind of mystery that has been hidden in the heart of God for all the ages. It was a secret that no one knew about.

**The gospel is something  
which is revealed to you  
by the Spirit of God.**

This is why Paul said that if the rulers of the age knew about this secret, or even logically understood what it was all about, they would never have crucified Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:7–8). But they did not know it or understand it. This is a profound wisdom that God kept secret through all the ages; He established it before the beginning of time in order that we might receive His glory.

**God prepared the message of the  
gospel in love for us.**

God prepared the message of the gospel in love for us. Through-

out the ages, He eagerly anticipated revealing this great secret to His people. This secret was something that would have a radical impact on man's existence; it would make it possible for man to be who God had created him to be. It would fulfill man's deepest longing. This is what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 2:9 when he wrote that no eye has seen and no ear has heard and no heart has understood what God has prepared for those who love Him.

Paul was not speaking of something God intended for us in heaven, or in the hereafter. That which God prepared for us in love is for now, while we live here on this earth. It is, however, a mystery that is hidden from us until the Spirit of God reveals it to us. Indeed, all our intellectual diligence and theological research will mean nothing if we do not allow God to break open His mysteries and thoughts for us.

In Matthew 16, Jesus had an interesting conversation with His disciples about who He is. He asked, "Who do the people think I am?"

"Well," they answered, "some say You are John the Baptist, others say Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

Peter was the first to answer His next question, "And who do you say that I am?"

He answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The way Jesus responded to Peter's answer was confirmation that the gospel message and Jesus Christ's identity was given to him through supernatural revelation: "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (v 17).

Years later, Paul received the same supernatural revelation ... that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that Jesus came to reveal God's original plan for mankind. This is what Paul believed, and he hoped that God would give each person in Ephesus a revelation of this mystery. Paul, therefore, prayed that God would give each of

them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him and that the eyes of their understanding would be opened so that they would know the hope of their calling and the riches of their glorious inheritance in the saints (see Ephesians 1:17–18).

*I am the lowest-ranked saint by far. (My claim to fame emphasizes the fact that grace is a gift and certainly not a reward for good behavior.) His grace alone qualifies me to declare this unexplored treasure of Christ in the nations. The unveiling of this eternal secret is to bring into public view an association that has always been hidden in God; Jesus Christ is the blueprint of creation.*

– EPHESIANS 3:8–9, THE MIRROR

My desire is that the Lord will open our eyes in this time so that we can also know His everlasting plan that He has had for us throughout the ages. God's intention is for all of us to receive this revelation through the working of His Spirit.

### **JESUS CHRIST IS THE KEY**

When we receive insight from the Holy Spirit, we understand exactly what this Good News involves. The key to unlocking this secret is found in the words of Peter, who said to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

The key to this mystery is believing that Jesus is the Son of God and that He came to carry out a complete work on the cross. He is the center of the gospel. If He had not been willing to offer Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for each person, becoming sin for us and allowing us to share in His glory, there would be no good news for anyone. The key to the gospel is in Christ's obedience, not in ours!

*... so also by one Man's obedience  
many will be made righteous.*

**- ROMANS 5:19**

Paul tells the church in Corinth that he only wants to talk about one thing – Jesus Christ who was crucified for us. From the beginning of creation, God has carried a plan for mankind in His heart, a plan which has now been revealed through His Son. The key to unlocking the mystery of the gospel is understanding who Jesus is and how His death on the cross impacts us. Understanding this unlocks God's eternal plan for mankind. This revelation of God's plan has been the best news for every single person throughout the history of mankind!

**The key to unlocking the mystery of the gospel is understanding who Jesus is and how His death on the cross impacts us.**

### **ELEMENTS OF THE MYSTERY REVEALED TO THE PROPHETS**

Throughout the Old Testament we see constant references to this mystery of God's master plan.

Just after the fall, we discover our first clue: God clothed Adam and Eve with the skin of an animal after they realized that they were naked. The blood of an innocent animal was a reference to the blood of Christ and a symbol of the righteousness with which we would be clothed in Christ.

Years later, God would ask Abraham to sacrifice his long-awaited, only son. The moment Abraham took the knife to kill Isaac, God stopped him. When Abraham looked up, he saw a ram caught in the thicket behind him. He took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt

offering in place of his son; God provided a ram to sacrifice in place of Isaac. Once again, the blood of an innocent animal provides a clue or reference to Christ, who would later die in our place.

Exodus 12 contains a similar clue: The Israelites slaughtered a Passover lamb on the night before they would be freed from slavery. The blood of the innocent lamb smeared on the doorframe was the sign to the angel of death to pass over their house and not take the life of the firstborn child. Again we see how an innocent lamb died as a substitute – just like the innocent, spotless Lamb of God would later die in our place.

God also shared elements of this mystery personally to people who sincerely sought after Him and served Him. They longed for the day when the Messiah would come and they passionately prophesied about everything that would take place. The Psalmist sings of this prophetically when he declares how God has done marvelous things through showing His saving power and revealing His righteousness in the sight of all the nations so that the ends of the earth will see His salvation (Psalm 98:1–3).

There are many passages in the Old Testament predicting the coming of Jesus as Savior and Mediator. One of the most beautiful of these is from the pen of Isaiah, where he writes of the crucifixion:

*Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised  
for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon  
Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have  
gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was  
oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His  
mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep*



*before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked – But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.*

**- ISAIAH 53:4-9**

When we hear Isaiah prophesy like this, we know it is not merely a clue or some kind of reference. In this instance we see a man speaking accurately and insightfully of things that would happen way beyond his lifetime. He had a revelation of what was to come – a revelation of the gospel and the implications this gospel would have.

Isaiah continues to prophesy about the implications of Christ's crucifixion or mankind in Chapter 61:

*“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”*

**- ISAIAH 61:1-3**

It would be almost 700 years before Jesus would stand in the synagogue and quote this exact passage of Scripture to the people. After He had read it and opened the scroll, the moment arrived when He said to them, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). The time had come. It was no longer time for clues and references. The Messiah had finally come and the New Testament, proclaiming how we are saved by grace, was finally set in motion.

The Old Testament is packed with clues about the Messiah who was yet to come. These clues and prophecies are very much like a wife who bought her husband a drill for his birthday. She actually bought the drill well before his birthday, and from the time she bought it, right up to his birthday, she kept hearing him say, "If only I had a drill." She knew he actually already had a drill, but she couldn't tell him because the time had not yet come – his birthday had not yet arrived. So she tried to encourage him: "Darling, you never know. Maybe you'll get a drill one day." She knew the drill had already been paid for and that he would definitely receive it on his birthday. She just needed to encourage him to keep believing and living with expectation.

The Old Testament prophets knew about this grace we would receive, but the time was not yet right for it to be revealed. Today, however, it is a completely different story because the time has already come. This mystery has already been revealed!

This is why Paul writes in Romans 16:25 that his task was to announce the good news of Jesus Christ and also the mystery that God had hidden from the very beginning. This plan had remained a mystery throughout the ages, but in Christ it was revealed. It was being made known to the people so they could believe and embrace this good news. The impact of this good news is so significant that the whole of creation was waiting for it and even the angels were watching for it to be revealed (1 Peter 1:12).

*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits  
for the revealing of the sons of God.*

**- ROMANS 8:19**

Can it be that the angels, who know what the gospel really entails, could not wait for the realization of this salvation plan? Our salvation can never be underestimated. It is proof of Christ's power. Those who are saved are God's trophy! To the heavenly beings, we are the showground of God's grace.

### **MAN'S RESPONSE**

I am convinced that thousands of Christians go through life without fully realizing this glorious inheritance God meant for us. Many are still where Paul was before he had an encounter with Jesus – they still place the full responsibility for their salvation on themselves. Basically, they try upholding the law by doing good works, hoping to win God's approval.

But God has already placed all the responsibility on Himself. There is nothing more you need to do to validate your salvation. Jesus Christ has completely disqualified us from all guilt and qualified us all for a life of victory and abundance.

**Jesus Christ has completely  
disqualified us from all guilt  
and qualified us all for a life  
of victory and abundance.**

Others are under the impression that they just need to wait patiently until they manage to convince God to give us this glory. But we merely need to discover this glory that was made available to us through Christ. God revealed His plan for mankind through the

cross of Christ. The engineer of the universe worked out our salvation down to the finest detail.

*This grace shown towards us communicates a wisdom and discernment of our worth that completely surpasses any definition. The secret is out! His cherished love-dream now unfolds in front of our very eyes.*

**- EPHESIANS 1:8-9, THE MIRROR**

Let me use the analogy of a gift that has been wrapped beautifully in colorful paper and has your name written on it. This gift is something that has been specifically chosen for you by someone because it is something you have always wanted. All you need to do is open it and enjoy it. You don't have to do anything to earn it. You just have to be willing to open it with gratitude in your heart, and when you make use of it, to really enjoy the value it brings to your life. The joy on your face is enough to satisfy the person who gave it to you.

It is the same with the gospel. It is a gift we receive from the heart of God that radically changes our lives. At the same time, it brings Him so much joy because we are the trophy, the proof of His victory over His enemies.

In John 12 we read about a group of Greeks who went to a festival to meet Jesus. They went to Phillip and asked him to pass on the message of their desire to see this miracle-working Rabbi. Jesus knew that He represented God's intention for every human and answered them: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24).

Jesus was that grain of wheat that fell to the ground and died so that it would produce much fruit. Jesus was the seed; today we

are the harvest, the reward of His suffering. He wants us to discover that all the properties that we admire in Him are also in us, because we are the harvest coming from that grain of wheat.

Paul's entire life's purpose on this earth was to get people to grasp this truth. He wanted every person to share in this great mystery of God.

*The unveiling of this eternal secret is to bring into public view an association that has always been hidden in God; Jesus Christ is the blueprint of creation.*

**- EPHESIANS 3:9, THE MIRROR**

May we all discover and appreciate God's great wisdom, revealed to us in the gospel! May this good news captivate your heart to such an extent that you will also dedicate your life to sharing this message with others.

## CHAPTER 2

# MY GOSPEL



**H**ave you ever been to a surprise party? So much effort goes into arranging one. The person for whom it is being arranged is usually blissfully unaware of all the preparations being made for her big day – there are people buying her favorite foods, looking for her favorite music, decorating a special place, and buying her special gifts.

There is a real buzz when the guests arrive and everyone wants to know what the plan of action was to get the guest of honor there without her knowing anything. When the guest of honor arrives, everyone remains as calm as possible and waits for her response ... how will she react when she finds out? The guest of honor is usually ecstatic when she realizes that someone has gone to all the trouble and expense of organizing a party that she did not ask for or expect, or deserve.

Just like a surprise party, God, in His love and grace, planned something for us – He sent His Son to die on the cross for us so that we could live guilt-free. It is a gift we did not ask for, expect, or deserve. God specially prepared this gift for us and so desires to reveal it and give it to us. Can you imagine how disappointed God

must be if, for whatever reason, someone does not want to receive it? This gospel is a gift which is meant for all of humanity – and that includes you and me!

### **IT IS MY GOOD NEWS!**

The book of Romans lays a foundation for the Christian life and is considered to be one of Paul's greatest theological bequests. He begins Romans by introducing himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and as someone who is set apart to preach the gospel. He also makes it clear right from the beginning that he is not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.

It is interesting to note how Paul's references to the gospel change throughout the book. He starts off by referring to the gospel of God and then he speaks of the gospel of Christ. At the end of Romans, after systematically laying the foundation for us and explaining the full meaning of the gospel, he refers to it as "my gospel":

*Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest ...*

**- ROMANS 16:25-26**

**Finally, the gospel becomes my own personal story, because I have been included in God's great love story!**

There is a progression in Paul's experience of the gospel. He knows that the gospel begins with the Father and is revealed through Christ. Paul then eventually realizes that God has included him in this gospel

long before he was born. Finally, the gospel becomes his own personal story because he has been included in God's great love story!

This good news so overwhelmed Paul that he spent the rest of his life telling others about it in order that they might come to the realization that they were included in it. As we have already seen, good news is only good news if it really is good news. Furthermore, good news is only really good news for someone if it affects them directly.

How does it benefit me if my brother calls me and says, "Good news! I won an overseas holiday and I fly out next Monday"? This is fantastic news, but it is not necessarily good news for me because it does not include me – it brings no change in my own life. When he leaves on the airplane on Monday, I still have to go to work. But if my brother calls me and says, "Good news! I won an overseas holiday and you're invited to come with me," it has a completely different implication for my life. This time I'm included and have a direct part in the prize he won.

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul writes that God's mysterious plan includes Gentiles as being co-heirs who are part of the same body and are equally included in His redemption plan. God included you and me in His plan.

## **ONE MAN FOR ONE MAN**

The day Adam sinned, sin and death entered the world. It was like a virus manifesting its symptoms in a body: after Adam, all people were born into sin, without choosing to do so. Paul says in Romans 5 that one man's crime resulted in all men being judged. Everyone who lived from Adam on was automatically sinful, purely as a result of coming directly from Adam's bloodline.

The fall caused man to lead an unworthy existence. Our lifestyle was determined by the dominant influence of sin and darkness. We could not help ourselves or free ourselves from this predicament:



*Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil – the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.*

**- EPHESIANS 2:1-3 NLT**

Each one of us was a prisoner, held at ransom by this situation. We did not choose to be slaves to sin and we did not ask for it – we were trapped in an abyss of a meaningless life of sin. We all faced the same dilemma – our lives were swept along by sin’s unseen influence.

We were under the power of darkness, a spiritual authority that held us hostage. This dictator exploited us and reproduced his character in us. We were all in this position – a prisoner of lust, perverted in our thoughts and behavior; oftentimes driven by the madness of being addicted to sensory avarice and momentary pleasure, trapped in a meaningless existence.

When God appointed Moses as the leader of Israel the law was given, which brought a distinct differentiation between right and wrong. The law came to reveal man’s sinful nature.

**The law made man aware of his sinful nature and his deep need for a Savior who would be able to deliver him.**

### **WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW?**

- It revealed our sin (see Galatians 3:19; Romans 5:20)

- The law was our disciplinarian that pointed us to Christ (see Galatians 3:24)

## Man's critical condition could in no way quench the overwhelming love of God.

The law made man aware of his sinful nature and his deep need for a Savior who would be able to deliver him. The law led us to Christ.

Man's critical condition could in no way quench the overwhelming love of God. He has always loved us relentlessly, with an urgency and intensity, and it is this love that saved us by grace:

*None of this could distract from the extravagant love of God,  
He continued to love us with the exact same intensity.*

- **EPHESIANS 2:4**, *THE MIRROR*

Just as the transgression of this one man, Adam, resulted in our judgment and death, in the same way, one Man's obedience brought us life and acquittal from this sentence. Just as one man was able to plunge all of mankind into sin, so this one Man, Jesus Christ, achieved freedom for all humanity:

*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners,  
so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.*

- **ROMANS 5:19**

### **MORE THAN CONQUERORS**

Mamelodi Sundowns or Orlando Pirates are names that don't mean very much to the average Afrikaans-speaking South African. If you were a supporter of one of these teams in the soccer league, however,

it would definitely be either good or bad news for you if they won or lost their games.

This principle of good or bad news is very clear to the majority of Blue Bulls, Lions, Cheetahs, Stormers, or Sharks supporters in South Africa. If your team wins and someone asks you for the result, you are more than willing to say, “We won” without personally contributing anything to the victory! In fact, some supporters have never even set foot on a rugby field in their life and in some cases don’t even understand all the rules of the game. And yet they feel that they are included in that moment of triumph; the victory achieved by the team they root for becomes their victory. They celebrate it as though they won it themselves! Good news is, therefore, only of value to you if it includes you.

Christ obtained a victory that includes the whole of mankind. Christ’s victory includes each of us personally, and this is what we need to discover. In Romans 8, Paul asks rhetorically if there is anything or anyone that could separate us from the love of Christ. He goes on to say that it is clear that despite us being believers, we are not exempt from things like persecution, hunger, and danger. The question is, “In the midst of all these things, is there anything that can separate us from the love of God?” The answer he gives us is a very definite no; there is nothing that can separate us from God’s love. Paul leaves the best part of his answer for last when he says that we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

**Christ’s victory includes each of us personally, and this is what we need to discover.**

Christ won the victory! He even conquered death! This is precisely where the good news becomes good news for you and me, because Christ included us and made us part of this victory. His

victory is, therefore, my victory. His triumph is my triumph. It is no longer merely *the* gospel, it is *my* gospel.

The reality of the victory Christ won for us is activated in our lives when we believe it. It is almost like someone sending you a parcel in the mail. It already belongs to you one hundred percent, you simply need to go and collect it from the post office. We receive the victory that Christ won for us on the cross through our faith:

*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.*

– JOHN 1:12

As children of God, we now share in His complete victory. We share in absolutely everything He went through. Just as much as we share in His death, we also share in His resurrection. One moment mankind was still stone dead in sin, but the moment Jesus was raised from death, all of humanity was given the opportunity to be raised from death with Him! Each one of us just needs to believe it in order to experience it.

## **OBEDIENCE THROUGH FAITH**

Faith is not a passive confession of these truths, but a conviction of the heart that leads to action. James said that faith without works is dead (2:17). Faith without the actions that flow from it is, in essence, not faith. Even Paul made it clear that faith and works or obedience go hand in hand:

*Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings*

*by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith ...*

**- ROMANS 16:25-26, NIV**

*The Mirror* says it this way:

*Because of what I am blessed to see in this gospel I am confident in God's ability to make you stand strong and immovable. I proclaim Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery which was concealed in silence in the sequence of timeless ages (this gospel breaks the silence of the ages, and reveals how God succeeded to redeem his image and likeness in man), but now is made publicly known; mirrored in prophetic scripture, the God of the ages has issued his mandate to make the mystery known in such a way that all the nations of the earth will discover the lifestyle (obedience) that the hearing of faith ignites.*

**- ROMANS 16:25-26**

The law and the Old Testament appealed to man's willpower to fully obey God's law. The New Testament is a realization by faith of a new way of living life that completely satisfies a human being and brings glory to God. Living by faith supposes that I have a relationship with God, the fruit of which is obedience.

When a man says to a woman, "I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you and care for you. Will you marry me?," what the man is actually asking is, "Will you trust me? Will you believe me?" The proposal is a significant event in every woman's life because it carries with it huge implications.

If she accepts the marriage proposal, her subsequent actions are evidence of her faith. Her love and trust in her future husband cause

her to do certain things and put certain things in motion. She immediately begins getting her wedding plans in order. She will pack up all her belongings and move into the same house as her husband after the wedding.

She does not do so against her will or to win his love – she has already won his love. She does what she does because she loves her future husband and also wants to share her life with him. It is her natural response to his expressed love and the promises he has made to her.

My wife and I do certain things for each other because we love each other, not because we are trying to win each other's approval; we already have each other's love and approval. Our love for each other has certain consequences and the things we do for one another are motivated by love, not fear. I don't pick up the towel from the bathroom floor because I'm scared of my wife, but because I respect her.

My relationship with Christ works in the same way. I am not obedient to Him because I am working to be included in the Gospel or to win His favor. Christ has already paid the price. I am already included and I have already won His favor. I honor and obey Him because it is the natural outflow of my love for Him.

In the Old Testament, people's motive for obedience was fear. They were fearful of God's judgment because they were unable to fulfill the law. In the New Testament, our motive for obedience is love for God. When the eyes of my heart are opened and I understand the gospel, my heart is filled with love for God the Father and for Jesus Christ my Redeemer. Paul calls this the obedience of faith – a spontaneous reaction to do what He wants me to do. This is the essence of the Good News.

## **GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE GOSPEL**

God's desire for man is no longer a mystery. He wants to share the secret that He had kept to Himself for years with everyone. The

gospel is the declaration of this mystery, of good news for you and me. The gospel was never intended to cause anyone to feel guilty about their sin or godless living. It was never intended to fill people with fear or judgment, as we have heard so often in Christian circles, consciously or not.

Paul says in Romans 2:4 that God is rich in goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering. Doesn't this tell you something? God wants to lead you to repentance by His goodness. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ paid with His life so that each one of us could experience the presence of God at any time and also experience His love, goodness, and favor in our lives. Everyone who was in debt has now been pronounced debt-free. Our debt is not only written off, but we can now receive God's favor without having to earn it:

Paul refers to this in Romans 5:8–11:

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

The starting point of the Gospel is, therefore, clear. One man's unrighteous act immersed mankind into slavery and, equally, one man's righteous act freed the whole of mankind:

*For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of*

*grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign  
in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*

- ROMANS 5:17

God desires that we would know the mystery that He had kept hidden throughout the ages, and He sent Christ to make this mystery a reality for us. The mystery is that there is a new life for us, characterized by the favor of God. This new life makes it possible for us to be free from everything that held us captive as a result of Adam's transgression.

In this new life, we share in His death, resurrection, and ascension. Because He suffered and died on the cross, we are no longer fallen people but are once again welcome in God's throne room; we once again have the same position of authority we had before the fall and even more. Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians that God, who is rich in mercy, raised us up with Christ. We are seated together with Christ Jesus in heavenly places so that now, and in the ages to come, He might show us the exceeding riches of His grace and kindness (see Ephesians 2:6–9). We rule and reign with Christ!

**The mystery is that there is a  
new life for us, characterized  
by the favor of God.**

“Heavenly places” is no longer our destination, but rather our starting point. Through faith, the reality of Christ's death and resurrection becomes a reality for me too. We do not work to be good enough to reign with Him in heavenly places one day. No, Christ paid the full price – there is nothing more that we can do. We now respond to what He has done by believing it, and this faith influences how we live.





# AWAY WITH GUILT AND SHAME

**A** friend once told me about her grandfather's custom of reading the Bible in his home every evening after dinner. The grandchildren each took turns fetching the Bible, while Grandpa wiped the last few grains of rice or breadcrumbs off the table to make sure it would not get soiled when placed before him.

After reading the passage for the evening he would pray, always ending with the following words: "Forgive us all our sins, for Christ's sake. Amen." These words always brought some measure of relief to everyone sitting around the table, because for a moment it felt like they were once again blameless before God and for that short moment didn't have to strain under the guilty weight of sin.

This friend always wondered what would happen if she happened to die just before dinner and had to carry an entire day's worth of sin on her without hearing the words "forgive us all our sins," the words that brought her such a sense of relief.

It is perfectly normal to feel bad if you've done something wrong and feel good if you've done something right. We all have

a conscience – the internal policeman that makes us feel uneasy when we’ve sinned and is quick to point out if we’re on the wrong track. Paul says that even heathens, those who do not have the law as their guideline, do the things that the law demands. The way these people behave is proof that the demands of the law are written on their hearts. Their consciences also witness to this when they are caught up in an internal duel, being accused or excused by their own thoughts.

*For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them ...*

– ROMANS 2:14–15

**Guilt is like a weight resting on our shoulders after we do something we know is wrong.**

Our conscience is very sensitive when it comes to experiencing guilt and shame. Guilt is like a weight resting on our shoulders after we do something we know is wrong. It is a bad feeling that does not want to go away. Guilt brings a lack of confidence before God. It always leads to judgment, which in turn leads to fear, eventually causing a sense of distance and later even complete alienation from God.

Shame differs from guilt in that it is an inherent conviction that you, as a person, are not good enough. It is self-judgment. Where guilt is the result of having done something wrong, shame does not need a wrong deed to be done, but is rather a permanent sense of

wrongness. Shame brings humiliation that robs you of your self-worth. It leaves you with a feeling of inherent worthlessness and a sense of rejection. It leads to behavior that reflects the conviction that you are fundamentally bad, deficient, sinful, and unworthy. It is, therefore, a feeling of inferiority about who and what you are.

## Shame brings a humiliation that robs you of your self-worth.

### **ALL HAVE SINNED AND ARE IN NEED OF A SAVIOR**

Before the fall, Adam truly lived out the purpose for which God created him. He had an intimate friendship with God and ruled on earth. He lived out his intended purpose until the day he sinned.

After he sinned, Adam's relationship with God was broken. Where Adam once enjoyed the freedom of walking with God in the cool of the night, he was now so full of guilt and shame that he hid away from God. He used fig leaves to cover himself, trying to get rid of his shame so he could freely walk with God in the garden like he did before.

But his own efforts to get rid of this guilt and shame were to no avail. Sin had its grip on him and the whole of mankind. Man became a slave to sin and also lost God as his friend. The Bible says that man died. This meant that he now strained under the weight of guilt and shame, and he also no longer had free access to the presence of God.

Human beings are all used to guilt and shame. We inherited this from Adam, and we cannot get rid of it. The result of Adam's one transgression is that we are all born equally under the power of sin. As Paul says in Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We are guilt-laden beings, held captive under the power of sin, and drifting ever further from God. We are guilty and ashamed,

our identity is that of a sinner, and we live and think like sinners.

This may all seem like bad news, but actually it's a good thing to be aware of our sin and guilt, because only in so doing can we understand, appreciate, and grab hold of the full implication of the gospel. When you go to the beach for a swim, there are usually lifeguards who keep a careful watch on the waves, the currents, and the swimmers. The presence of a lifeguard is not very important for the person having a leisurely swim in shallow water. But the situation changes drastically when that person is suddenly swept away by a current and cannot keep his head above water any longer. He suddenly gains a much higher appreciation for the lifeguards, who have become his only hope.

If we do not truly realize how totally lost we were as a result of our sinful nature, we will never need a Savior and the saving work that Christ did on the cross for us will never be of value to us. When you understand that you are completely lost as a result of your sinful nature Christ becomes your focus and your only hope!

## **CHRIST OUR SAVIOR**

The good news is that all of us who were laden with guilt and shame have been set free by Jesus Christ. Just as the first Adam immersed us all into sin, Jesus Christ the second Adam delivered us all from it.

From His birth on, Jesus was set to be our deliverer. Jesus Christ was born a man, just like you and me, but with one difference – He was born of a virgin. This is important because it means that Jesus was not born from Adam's bloodline. He was not automatically born into sin. Mary's body served as the carrier of God's seed so that the Son of God could be born as a man, but He was without sin. Jesus was born of a virgin in order that he would originate from God's seed and not man's. He is Immanuel, God with us, God who became flesh.

This resulted in the fact that Jesus was the only man born without sin on earth and, therefore, could live without guilt and shame. He was the only one who could qualify as the Savior of mankind to rescue us out of sin. He alone could carry out the task of laying down His (sinless) life for (sinful) mankind. This is why Jesus says He is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one can come to the Father except through Him (see John 14:6).

**The crucifixion was a success –  
there was nothing else needed to  
save mankind; the price had  
been paid in full!**

Man's sin had to be punished somehow. God did not overlook our sin or change His mind and decide not to punish sin. There was only one punishment for sin, and that was death. But Jesus was willing to carry that punishment on our behalf. He was punished for the things for which we should have been punished. God dealt with sin that came to destroy mankind once and for all when Jesus was crucified.

When Isaiah prophesied about the crucifixion, he said that it pleased God to strike Jesus. How could such a thing be pleasing? Because He saw the salvation of mankind. Mankind was completely freed when Christ died and was raised from the dead. The crucifixion was a success – there is nothing else needed to save mankind; the price has been paid in full!

*The Mirror* puts it like this:

*Scripture concludes that all men without exception  
are in the same predicament, they are imprisoned to sin;  
now faith brings the promise of immediate release within eve-*

*ryone's reach! Jesus Christ makes it possible for all to believe what God believes concerning their righteousness and restored innocence.*

**- GALATIANS 3:22**

**Righteousness means that we have been declared “not guilty,” or rather “innocent,” by God and that we have been completely approved and accepted by him.**

We are, therefore, no longer sinners, but the righteousness of God. *Righteousness* means that we have been declared “not guilty,” or rather “innocent,” by God and that we have been completely approved and accepted by Him. The gift of righteousness means that we do not need to be punished for our sins because Jesus took the punishment for sin on our behalf and redefined our status from “sinner” to “righteous.”

This is why Romans 8:1 says: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The moment Jesus died, He took the sin of the whole world upon Himself. He not only carried our sin; He became sin. An exchange took place: Jesus became sin and we were declared not guilty and became the righteousness of God.

*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

**- 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21**

**Righteousness is the position you hold in Christ.**

Righteousness is a position, an identity you receive based on your faith in the complete sacrifice of Christ. Righteousness is the position you hold in Christ, it is not something you receive in various measures. You are either righteous or sinful – you are not one or the other at different times.

This is a new identity for you. Before you met Jesus, you were known as a sinner. You had every reason to feel guilty and ashamed. But now your shame and guilt have been replaced with righteousness and confidence before God. You have received a new identity in Christ; you are innocent and completely accepted; you have been exonerated of all punishment.

The gospel (the good news) is about how God succeeded in ridding man of his old identity as a sinner and giving him a new identity. Through our redemption in Christ, once again, we have become the image of God revealed. This is indeed good news!

### **BUT THERE IS MORE ...**

Paul says in Romans 5:17 that through the transgression of the one man (Adam) death reigned, but through the One, Jesus Christ, so much more was gained. Jesus achieved so much more than simply neutralizing or cancelling the effect of sin. In other words, Jesus did not simply even things up, but He made sure that He added much more. Not only is Adam no longer the reference to my existence and identity, but Jesus Christ Himself has now become the reference to my existence.

There is so much more to the meaning of the word *salvation* than what we initially might think. *Salvation* comes from the Greek word *soteria*, which also means “wholeness, restoration, and fullness.” Salvation is the restoration of that which was lost or broken. Where man was broken as a result of sin, the gospel has the power to make us whole again. Salvation involves the total restoration of a broken person to wholeness and a full life.



*Salvation comes from the Greek word *soteria*, which also means “wholeness, restoration, and fullness.”*

## THE GOSPEL VERSUS RELIGION

The gospel calls us to into a relationship with God, not to a religion. To be religious, in the negative sense, is to do everything in your power to keep God happy and to try to live up to His expectations in your own strength. Religion is man’s attempt to rectify what Adam did wrong. By contrast, faith is understanding that nothing that we do right could ever restore our position with God; Christ has already done everything that was necessary.

People who cannot move beyond this point of view are called religious Christians. They understand that man once had a perfect relationship with God and that the fall resulted in separation between God and man. They also understand that Christ redeemed them from the power of sin and death, but it is as though the full implications of this truth have not yet sunk in. Religious people try to live extremely carefully according to Biblical principles in an attempt to win and maintain God’s favor. They see the Bible as a moral handbook, out of which they need to regulate their behavior as fearfully and piously as possible. If they do not do so, or fail to get it right, they immediately become unsure of their position before God, which influences their ability to come to God confidently and fearlessly. Asking God to forgive their sins at the end of each day becomes something religious people grab hold of in a desperate attempt to fulfill that which they could not achieve in their own human strength that day.

But we are in the privileged position of knowing that we are already forgiven. We can, therefore, thank Him for the complete work of salvation. We don’t have to do anything else to be accepted or to earn

God's favor. When you, as a Christian, still feel you need to do things to win God's approval, you are no better off than any other person of another religion. The gospel is not about what you still need to do; it is about discovering what Christ has already done for you.

Hebrews 10:14 tells us that it took one perfect sacrifice by one perfect person to perfect a lot of imperfect people:

*It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people. By that single offering, he did everything that needed to be done for everyone who takes part in the purifying process.*

**- HEBREWS 10:14, THE MESSAGE**

Sometimes we cannot believe that Christ has already done everything for us because we are so conditioned to believe that we must this and we must that. Forget for a moment what you feel you must do as a believer, and reflect for a moment on the truth that you already have God's favor. Most people with a good religious background will probably experience tension at this idea. It almost sounds too good to be true.

Trying to contribute something towards your salvation is like doing what Adam and Eve did when they covered themselves with fig leaves to hide their shame. Paul stands amazed that there are Christians who miss God's salvation and continue in their own efforts to be saved:

*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to*

*the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law  
for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

**- ROMANS 10:1-4**

The difference between religion and the good news of the gospel is that religion still attempts, straining under the weight of guilt and shame, to win the approval of God through its own efforts. For years, the emphasis of our religion has been man's sinful nature as a result of the fall. We have overshadowed salvation in Christ with the shame of the fall. The good news of the gospel grew dim as a result of our sin-consciousness and our inability to live right.

## **God found us in Christ long before he lost us in Adam.**

But God found us in Christ long before he lost us in Adam. Scripture tells us that God carefully planned our salvation in Christ before the foundation of the world. In Him, everything was accomplished to restore us to our original created purpose of being God's image bearers.

The good news of the gospel is that Christ carried the punishment of our sins for us and made us the righteousness of God. Instead of feeling inferior and useless, we can, therefore, enjoy an intimate relationship with God without blame. If we preach anything else, we are not preaching the gospel. Religion will get us nowhere. We cannot save ourselves, and we can do nothing to win God's approval. The gospel is the good news that God is pleased with man. God is not angry or just putting up with us. Jesus came to earth to proclaim this mystery from the heart of the Father.

### **THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL**

No wonder Paul boasts of the power contained in the gospel:

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*

**- ROMANS 1:16**

**The power of the gospel is not only to pronounce us free from sin, but to place us in a position of total freedom, confidence, and rulership.**

The power of the gospel is not only to pronounce us free from sin, but to place us in a position of total freedom, confidence, and rulership. It is a power that makes people whole again. The power of the gospel, says Paul, lies in the revelation that we have now been declared the righteousness of God:

*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*

**- ROMANS 1:17**

*Herein lies the secret of the power of the gospel; there is no good news in it until the righteousness of God is revealed!*

**- ROMANS 1:17, THE MIRROR**

Paul was completely convinced of the power contained in the gospel. He even says to the church in Corinth that he does not preach a gospel that he hopes will work, but a truth that stands firm, of which he is completely convinced. Whatever happened to mankind as a result of the fall is something of the past, and our salvation supersedes it:

*Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.*

**- ROMANS 5:18**

The J.B. Phillips translation of Romans 5:18 reads as follows:

*We see, then, that as one act of sin exposed the whole race of men to God's judgment and condemnation, so one act of perfect righteousness presents all men freely acquitted in the sight of God.*

Paul compares the effects of the fall of man and every single sin after that with the one act of Christ which freed us forever, and the sacrifice of Christ far outweighs everything else. We are truly and eternally free from all guilt and shame. The gospel is good news!

# YOU'RE NO SINNER!

**W**e all learned about metamorphosis in biology class. It is when a living organism adopts a completely new form and becomes a totally different organism. The example we all know well is when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly.

Silkworms are strange things. They have fat little bodies, eat mulberry leaves all day, and move around with cute little peristaltic movements. But the most important thing about a silkworm is that it acts like a caterpillar because it is, in essence, a caterpillar. When they mature into adult silkworms they begin producing silk, and shortly after that they spin themselves tightly into a bright yellow cocoon. Once the silkworm has been cocooned, it changes form and a completely different creature eventually emerges. A few days earlier it was still a silkworm, and suddenly it has become a moth with wings!

The miracle of metamorphosis is that there is now absolutely no sign of the caterpillar. The moth or butterfly looks completely different, and you can hardly imagine that this beautiful winged creature was a fat caterpillar just a few days before. Suddenly, he no longer moves with peristaltic movements along the ground, but has two

beautiful wings with which to fly. He also no longer eats mulberry leaves, but lives off the sticky, sweet nectar of flowers and blossoms. The most important thing about a butterfly is that it acts like a butterfly because it is, in essence, a butterfly.

## WHAT WERE YOU ORIGINALLY DESIGNED FOR?

All of us were just like the caterpillar.

*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin my mother conceived me.*

- PSALM 51:5

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

- ROMANS 3:23

We were all sinners as a result of Adam's one transgression, which is why we acted like sinners. We thought like sinners, behaved like sinners, and spoke like sinners. This is why we walked around with this eternal feeling of guilt – guilt because we continued to sin and shame because we were always convinced of our inferiority and that we were never good enough (not good enough for God or for the people around us). We all sinned and could no longer partake in the glory of God.

When Paul refers to sin, he uses the Greek word *hamartia*. Sin does not merely mean doing wrong things, because *hamartia* means to miss your purpose or target. Sin means that you miss the purpose for which God created you.

**Sin does not merely speak of doing wrong things, because *hamartia* literally means to miss your purpose or target.**

That's a problem, because whenever anything is used for something for which it was not specifically designed, it is bound to get damaged. All the qualities of that item were created to function in a certain way, and using it for another purpose doesn't work well. For example, it is not recommended that you go out and hunt wild rabbits in your BMW Z4, despite it probably being a lot of fun to speed around off-road in a sports car. The fun could never justify the damage that it would cause. The truth is, the car was designed for a completely different terrain and purpose.

This important principle can also apply to our lives. If you do not live according to the purpose for which you were created, you will also become damaged. The reason we see so much pain in people's lives around us is essentially that people are living outside of their created purpose. God originally commanded man to rule:

*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

**- GENESIS 1:26**

When Adam became a sinner and, therefore, did things that were contrary to what he was originally created to do, he lost his total innocence before God and was unable to rule and reign from this place of wholeness in his identity. We became damaged too.

It was God's dream for us to live in an intimate relationship with Him and reign as kings on the earth. But sin entered the world, accompanied by guilt and shame. These two forces caused us to become inferior beings and completely undermined our authority as rulers. Guilt and shame oppressed all of mankind and made us slaves of an inferior way of living. There can be no greater news than



to hear that we've all been totally freed from this lifestyle. The day dawned when our Savior and Redeemer died for us on the cross, delivering us from the paralyzing effect of guilt and shame and restoring us as rulers.

## Christ died on the cross to deal with your identity as a sinner.

Unfortunately, many Christians think they are still sinners and, as a result, behave as though they are. Christ died on the cross to deal with your identity as a sinner; He came to deliver you by becoming sin so that you could become the righteousness of God.

### A SPIRITUAL METAMORPHOSIS

One night, a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus went to Jesus to find out more about Him. He knew that Jesus was a man of God and that He performed miracles because God was with Him. In the course of their conversation Jesus told him that he needed to be born again: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Of course, what Jesus said did not make any sense to Nicodemus, so he asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely you cannot enter your mother's womb for a second time to be born!" He must have wondered how on earth that could be possible. Knowing that Jesus was implying a new way of living, he wanted to understand how he could attain it. He probably expected Jesus to give him a list of laws he would have to live up to – laws that would require him to rely once again on his works and responsibility to make sure he did everything right to qualify or deserve to be born of God. Perhaps he expected Jesus to give him the kind of answer that would help him, as a caterpillar, to try to live like a

butterfly every day so that he could earn God's approval and in this way qualify for God's kingdom. But caterpillars cannot fly! He was completely stunned with the answer Jesus gave him when He said:

*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,  
even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever  
believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*

**- JOHN 3:14-15**

As a student of the Law, Nicodemus remembered the story of the snake. We read about this in Numbers 21, where God allowed poisonous snakes to come into the camp and bite the Israelites. The people began to die and Moses begged God for help. God commanded him to mount a bronze snake on a pole and promised that if anyone were bitten by a poisonous snake and looked up, in faith, at this bronze snake, they would be healed. This was a strange command, even for Moses, because a snake was the symbol of sin, unrighteousness, and oppression and because copper (the primary ingredient of bronze), being a "base" or impure metal, symbolized the sinful nature of man.

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus made these events applicable to Himself. He knew He would have to become sin on the cross to neutralize the poison of sin in man when sinful man believed in Him. But could Nicodemus fully understand this? Was it possible for him to simply believe in this Jesus in order to be born again, especially when Jesus was comparing Himself to the snake on the pole?

There are so many people who have never had the opportunity to undergo this metamorphosis of being transformed from a sinner to someone righteous. As a result, they behave like sinners, because inherently they are still sinners. It doesn't matter how hard they try

not to sin; a caterpillar can never be a butterfly, even on its best day.

There are others who have actually undergone this metamorphosis but have never realized its truth and effect. They have wings, yet they crawl around on the ground; they are righteous, but still see themselves as sinners. People think it is pious to say, “I’m just a sinner,” and then to add, equally piously, “saved by grace.” They continue to refer to themselves as sinners because they misunderstand and underestimate the grace of God. If God has saved you from sin, delivered and freed you, how can you still be a sinner? This lie will continue to have a hold on you as long as you hold onto your identity as sinner. As long as you believe you are a sinner, you will act like one.

**You have received a brand-new identity – you are not a sinner anymore!**

Such people see themselves as caterpillars that have to try really hard to be a better caterpillar every day so that one day they might become a butterfly. The truth is, in Christ you have received the identity of a butterfly. You no longer have to crawl around on the ground. All you have to do is spread your wings and fly! A butterfly remains a butterfly even though it sometimes gets wet, dirty, or hungry. As a born-again child of God, you are no longer a sinner who has to try not to sin anymore. You are righteous. Can you see how radically different this is from what most people believe? You have received a brand-new identity – you are not a sinner anymore!

### **YOUR NEW IDENTITY**

You were conceived and born in sin. You were once a sinner. Through the cross, however, a divine exchange took place between you and

God. You exchanged your guilt for grace; you exchanged shame for righteousness; you exchanged past hurts for wholeness.

The old 'you' is dead ... stone-dead. You died with Christ on the cross. You were pronounced dead and you were buried. But you were spiritually raised with Christ and are now a completely new creation! The old you died, and the new you is now alive. You do not have a schizophrenic life of having two natures; 'the body of sin', the old nature, has been done away with.

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*

*For he who has died has been freed from sin.*

**- ROMANS 6:4-7**

You can't be righteous today and then if you do something wrong tomorrow, not be righteous anymore. You don't lose your righteousness and then get it back if your behavior says you've earned it. Your position in Christ is permanent. The moment your righteousness is dependent upon your works, you're busy with religion. Righteousness is a gift that cannot be earned. You don't have to fulfill a whole lot of rules and regulations in the hope of winning God's approval. In Christ, you are the righteousness of God.

Because you are now the righteousness of God, you can once again approach the Father with confidence. Jesus gave up this position so that our intimacy with the Father could be restored. He

took the burden of sin upon Himself and cried out: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Take note that Jesus did not cry, “My Father,” because at that moment there was no longer that level of intimacy between Him and the Father. The Father had to “for-sake” Jesus because He had become sin in order that you could have the right to call God your Father.

### **LIVING OUT YOUR NEW IDENTITY**

After God delivered Israel from the destruction of slavery in Egypt, the Israelites could move to a new land, free from the Egyptians. They also had a new identity: they were no longer slaves, they were now God’s chosen people. But the moment the slightest difficulty crossed their path, they were quick to yearn for their lives as slaves.

Sometimes we respond just like the Israelites of old: we are so well schooled in our old, sinful identity that we are, in some cases, prepared to fight religiously to hang on to it. Even though living as a sinner is destructive and holds absolutely no joy, the “I’m just a poor old sinner” identity is something so familiar that we want to hold on to it for all it’s worth.

But now that you’re no longer a sinner, who are you really? Let me use the example of a second-hand car. The salesman will confidently say to you, “This car has been remodeled so beautifully, it’s as good as new.” While this may be true, the fact of the matter is the car is not new – someone has owned it and used it before you. The mileage has already clocked two hundred thousand and it remains a 2001 model. God does things differently, as evidenced in these Scriptures:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

**- 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17**

*Now whoever you thought you were before,  
in Christ you are a brand new person! The old ways of  
seeing yourself and everyone else are over. Look! The  
resurrection of Jesus has made everything new!*

**- 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17, THE MIRROR**

If you are in Christ, you are not simply a second-hand model that has been polished up. Rather, it's like you're a brand-new model that has never been driven before, with zero mileage on the odometer. You're as new as someone who has just been born. No baby is born already carrying an old identity book, a criminal record, or a lengthy financial portfolio. You get a brand-new birth certificate regardless of your family history. God does not make you as good as new, He makes you brand new! He allows you to be born again as someone completely different. If you are born of God as a brand-new person, how on earth could you still be a sinner? You are not a caterpillar that just got wings and a new diet – you are a butterfly to the very core!

## **Righteousness is a position of total innocence.**

If we have received a brand-new identity in Christ, why then do we hold fast to our identity as sinners, when God has clothed us in a robe of righteousness? Righteousness is the greatest, deepest deliverance from guilt and shame. It is even more life-changing than stepping down off the stand in a court of law after the judge pronounces us not guilty. Righteousness is a position of total innocence. This righteousness is the foundation of our new identity and also the primary characteristic of who we are in Christ. God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf so that we could

become the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus Christ is now the reference point of your identity. He is the blueprint of your identity. Jesus is not only an example for us, but of us.

*... because as He is, so are we in this world.*

**- 1 JOHN 4:17**

It was always the Father's intention that we live according to the blueprint of the Son.

*He pre-designed and engineered us from the start to be jointly fashioned in the same mold and image of his son according to the exact blueprint of his thought. We see the original and intended pattern of our lives preserved in his Son.*

*He is the firstborn from the same womb that reveals our genesis. He confirms that we are the invention of God.*

**- ROMANS 8:29, THE MIRROR**

Mankind is no longer prisoner to Adam's bloodline. We now qualify as a new race, a new species born of God:

*For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus:  
that if One died for all, then all died ...*

**- 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14**

**Jesus Christ is the definition of  
your true identity – your origin is  
now in Christ.**

The price has been paid once and for all. You do not originate from the sinful bloodline of Adam, but the bloodline of Christ. Jesus Christ

is the definition of your true identity – your origin is now in Christ:

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

**- ROMANS 8:29**

The concept of “firstborn” comes from the Greek word *proto*. This word is not just numerical in nature, but indicates the nature or specification of something. In other words, we are designed to be able to live like Christ!

The movie *The Princess Diaries* tells the story of a teenage girl living in New York who is struggling to find her place in society. Then comes a piece of completely unexpected news: she is actually the princess of a small European country and next in line to the throne. The film very humorously tells the story of how her grandmother tries to help her “unlearn” her old ways of doing things and teach her to act according to her newfound identity.

This film made me think of the situation many of us find ourselves in. Each of us has received a brand-new identity, but we often don't know how to get rid of our old identity as sinners so that we can rule and reign as kings. The biggest problem is primarily in our thoughts. Just like the girl in the movie, it is sometimes difficult for us to think and behave differently. Paul says we shouldn't conform our behavior to the world's way of doing things, but that we should rather allow God to change us through renewing our thought patterns:

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

**- ROMANS 12:2**



Paul is addressing the root of the problem here – our thinking and established thought patterns. He encourages us to think differently and no longer to see ourselves as sinners. You need to live with the assurance that you are the righteousness of God – completely innocent, a new creation, fully restored and appointed to rule and reign.

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God's ideal for every person is that we would be who He originally created us to be. The only way you'll ever get this right is to discover each day who you are in Christ. The greatest and most liberating discovery you could make is that Christ is not only an example *for* you, but rather an example *of* you. You're no longer looking through the display window of a shop, hoping to be like Him one day. You are now looking into a mirror and discovering that He is an example of you, and that you look just like Him.

The most important thing you need to know about your godly identity is that you act like Christ because you are, in essence, just like Him.

# LIVE AS A NEW MAN

In 2011 Prince William and Kate Middleton were joined in matrimony at a highly traditional wedding ceremony, which the media referred to as the wedding of the century. Millions of people watched the ceremony, caught up in the magic of the moment. There is always something special about a man and woman getting married. There is nothing like a beautiful wedding photo of a famous couple on a magazine cover to increase sales. It is even noticeable on Facebook: the comments start rolling in when someone announces they are engaged.

So much effort and attention goes into planning a wedding that you almost give a sigh of relief when the wedding day finally arrives and everything runs smoothly. Nevertheless, the wedding day and ceremony were never intended to be the grand finalé or highlight of the relationship. The preparations and long-awaited wedding day are not the final destination, but rather the beginning and pronouncement of an expected happily ever after.

## **AN INVITATION TO HAPPILY EVER AFTER**

Our relationship with Christ is compared to that of a man and woman

in an intimate love relationship because God desires to have an intimate relationship with each one of us. God not only loves us, but is Himself the origin and essence of love. God is love.

Love is something which only really comes into its own when it is expressed in relationship to someone else because love is, in essence, a declaration of value. You cannot love if you do not consider the object of your love valuable. God's love for man was the proof that He deemed us extremely valuable.

**Love is, in essence,  
a declaration of value.**

God made man to live in relationship with Him. Unfortunately, Adam's sin destroyed that intimacy. Death reigned as a result of his one crime; this death refers to the separation between God and man. This meant that man lost his purpose for living, because God was now far from him and all that remained was the overwhelming burden of guilt, shame, and pain.

Since then, every man has been confronted with this internal vacuum which he consciously and subconsciously tries to fill in all sorts of ways – whether it is searching for status, wealth, pleasure, or even spiritual experiences outside of a relationship with Christ. It doesn't matter what you try to fill this spiritual vacuum with: whether it is a new age spiritual cleansing program, your Zen garden, or attempting to climb the Himalayas on your hands and knees, you will never be internally satisfied until you are filled with God. The Greek word for the vacuum inside us is *koilia*, which means “belly” or “heart.” This specific word was used when Jesus called out: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me ... and out of his heart (*koilia*) will flow streams of living water” (John 7:37–38). God desires more than anything that we experience this satisfaction in the very core of who

we are. Yet it is impossible to achieve this in our own strength.

This is why Mankind needed a Savior – someone who could transform our lives and restore our relationship with the Father. Jesus was willing to be that person. The good news declares that we just have to believe in Christ and the finished work He carried out on the cross, and we will have a transformed life. A whole new level of intimacy and fulfillment in our relationship with God flows from this act of faith. My dedication and obedience now flows naturally from the realization that God’s favor is already on my life.

### **THE CURTAIN IS TORN**

The moment Jesus died, the curtain of the temple in Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish religious system, was torn in two. In order to understand the full implications of this, we first need to understand what that curtain symbolized. This curtain is what separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the temple. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and only once a year, to ask forgiveness for the sins of the people. Nobody else was allowed to go in, otherwise they would surely die:

*And the LORD said to Moses: “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.”*

**- LEVITICUS 16:2**

The high priest needed to follow a very strict ritual before entering the Most Holy Place, otherwise he would also die. He first had to cleanse himself with water and clothe himself in his priestly garments. After that, he sacrificed a bull and took the blood of the bull along with a bowl of incense into the Most Holy Place. He then took the blood

and sprinkled it on the mercy seat. In this way he asked for forgiveness for himself. After that he had to repeat the entire procedure, but this time he had to sprinkle the blood of a goat on the mercy seat in order to ask for forgiveness for the sins of the entire nation.

After this, the high priest laid his bloodstained hands on the head of a second goat, which symbolized placing the sins of the entire nation onto this goat. The goat was then sent into the wilderness to die. This goat was known as the scapegoat. Both goats would die, the one on the altar and the other in the harshness of the wilderness.

This entire ritual was symbolic of man's condition: he could choose to identify with the death of the goat on the altar or he could choose to follow his own path and eventually be confronted with his own corruption, like the goat that was sent into the wilderness to die. The high priest brought the blood of the goat before God as penance for the people's sin. Everyone's sin was covered and they could all go home. This ritual took place once a year, every year.

But there came a day when another High Priest came and shed His own blood, and His blood was good enough to eternally, once and for all, remove the sins of the people and not simply to cover them. The blood of Jesus paid the full price for everyone's sins for eternity:

*... not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another – He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*

**- HEBREWS 9:25-26**

Through this one perfect sacrifice, we are free once and for all! *The Message* translates Hebrews 9:25-26 as follows:

*He doesn't do this every year as the high priests did under the old plan with blood that was not their own; if that had been the case, he would have to sacrifice himself repeatedly throughout the course of history. But instead he sacrificed himself once and for all, summing up all the other sacrifices in this sacrifice of himself, the final solution of sin.*

## **LICENSE TO SIN?**

Jesus was the scapegoat who took each one of our sins upon Himself was crucified at Golgotha, a hill outside the city. Jesus did not only take the sins of selected people upon Himself, but He paid for the totality of every sin committed by every single person who would ever live! For the first time since the fall of Adam, man was legally free from guilt and shame. This new blameless identity gives us the privilege of having an unhindered relationship with God.

**This new blameless identity gives us the privilege of having an unhindered relationship with God.**

When you understand that you have unhindered access to the throne of God, and once you've tasted the reality of having a relationship with the Author of life, you don't live as though you are trying to qualify for heaven. You then see sin and incorrect behavior in a completely different light. Some people, and even some believers in their ignorance, try to see how much they can sin and still qualify for heaven. They believe that it is their sin that prevents them from getting into heaven, and want to know how much they can get away with.

But the essential result of sin is not missing out on heaven, it

is the separation between ourselves and God and the loss of the intimacy that is supposed to exist between us and God. Sin is thus the evidence of an identity not yet discovered. When you sin, what you are really missing out on is the taste of heaven that is available here on earth – the intimacy you could be enjoying with God and the rights of citizenship in heaven. Why would you want to wait for something that you could already have now?

Jesus' death on the cross was by no means a license to carry on sinning. He did not die so we could simply carry on with our sinful habits without feeling any consequence for them whatsoever. Sin must be seen for what it is: the instrument that charged us with guilt and shame. Sin is most definitely not just a few things we did wrong that we need to quickly confess to escape punishment. Sin ruins the ability to enjoy and appreciate life in its fullness. Through sin we miss the original created purpose that Christ redeemed us for through His suffering – to discover our true identity and to restore our intimate relationship with the Father.

When Jesus was on the cross, he cried out: "It is finished!" and the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom (Mt. 27:50–51; John 19:30). This was a sign that we could access the presence of God with liberty. The offer was perfect and complete, and it would never again be necessary for any man to have to pay penance for his sins. Neither would man need a priest to mediate between himself and God, for Jesus was the perfect mediator. We now have free access to God.

After Jesus died, God the Father never said: "Everyone's sin is now forgiven; you can all go home and live like you want." No, the curtain was torn and the Father invited everyone to come inside to live a life of abundance. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ was not the grand finalé. It was merely the declaration of the beginning of a brand-new life with God.

## Our reward is not only heaven, but the privilege of having access to the presence of God.

We are now welcome in the Most Holy Place because God, in Christ, cleansed us from all our sin and now sees us as cleansed in Christ. Our High Priest carried out a perfect and complete work on the cross and fully reconciled us with the Father. Our reward is not only the assurance of eternal life in heaven, but the privilege of having access to the presence of God now, in this life. We do not work to qualify for it – even our best attempts to uphold the law could not achieve it. Through Jesus Christ alone we have the privilege of entering His presence any time, without any fear or judgment in our hearts:

*Yes, the old requirement about the priesthood was set aside because it was weak and useless. For the law never made anything perfect. But now we have confidence in a better hope, through which we draw near to God.*

– HEBREWS 7:18–19, NLT

### THE LOVE OF A FATHER

We now have a different kind of relationship with Him than when we were sinners, because we have received a new identity. He illustrates His relationship with us as one between a father and son, or between a bride and bridegroom. In our relationship with God, we are no longer afraid of Him, although we do respect Him. We discover that God does not want to punish us, but that He really loves us. The lightning bolt of God's wrath against sin struck Jesus in our place and we now experience His favor. God is not just putting up with us or keeping His distance from us; He rejoices over us!



God wants to reveal Himself to us as a loving father who accepts us unconditionally.

*So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."*

**- ROMANS 8:15, NLT**

Paul uses the Aramaic word *Abba* to describe this father-son relationship. It is a more intimate form of father, a word like "daddy" that is usually used by small children. Paul explained to the Ephesians that God desires to be a father to us:

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

**- EPHESIANS 2:13-18, NIV**

Unfortunately, not all of us have a healthy image of who and what a father is. For some people, the thought of God being a father is anything but pleasant. God wants to be the father to you that you may never have known or had. He wants to protect you and provide for you. He has planned an exciting future for you and has already

made full provision for it. This is also why Jesus began with “Our Father” when he was teaching us how to pray.

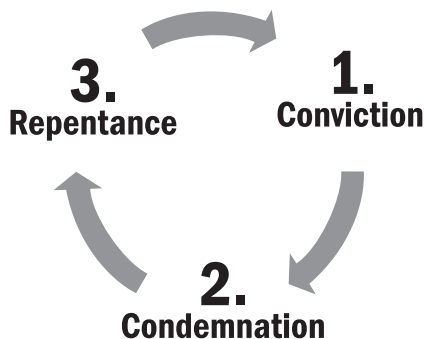
**He made the love  
that was in the heart of the  
Father tangible for us.**

Christ made the love that was in the heart of the Father tangible for us; this is why you need to discover Christ’s great love story in your own life. This discovery empowers you to live from a whole new framework of life.

Although our relationship with God is completely restored and we are able to live in that fullness today, the truth is that we can sometimes get caught in feelings of guilt. We sometimes feel distant from God as a result of how we live. We fall into a cycle of guilt when we miss the reality of intimacy with God. This is why it is essential to keep our focus on God’s grace and His message of salvation so that we can enjoy intimacy with God.

### **THE CYCLE OF GUILT**

The cycle of guilt has three primary components: conviction, condemnation, and repentance.



Firstly you become *convicted* of your sin and try to carry on living as a better person, doing your best not to sin. You decide to do your best to live a blameless life. Before you know it, you do something wrong and end up disappointed in yourself.

This is when *condemnation* comes in. You feel ashamed and terrible about what you did wrong. You go back to feeling guilty and have no confidence to go before God. And then you revert to living the life you used to live before you met Jesus Christ.

The next step is to *repent*. You go to church on Sunday and it feels like the preacher is speaking directly to you. Your conscience is screaming at you, and you decide to confess your sins and bring your shame to the Lord. You trust that He will forgive you and then you decide, once again, to go back to trying your best to live right.

This is the cycle that I, as a believer, experienced for years, and I just accepted that this was the way it worked. We are taught, after all, to make quality decisions in life and to give our best to the Lord. It sounds so pious and right, but deep down inside we all hope there is a better way.

All of us have been caught in this cycle at one point or another. Each time we make the decision to live right, we stumble and feel guilty and repent once again. This cycle does not have a happy ending because we constantly feel we are not good enough. This is precisely what the Old Covenant's way of living was based on. People needed to bring a sacrifice to pay for their sins. Although it averted God's punishment, the people could not get rid of the sense of guilt, and this is what maintained the feeling of distance between them and God.

**The blood of Jesus has not only covered our sins, but it has totally washed them away, together with our guilt, to cleanse our conscience.**

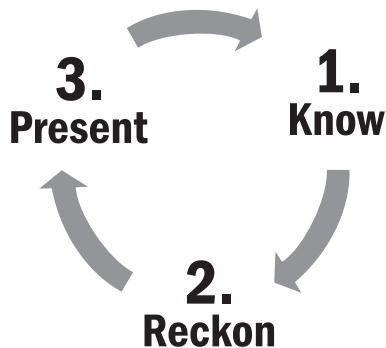
This is where the New Testament radically differs from the Old. The blood of Jesus has not only covered our sins, but it has totally washed them away, together with our guilt, to cleanse our conscience:

*But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*

– HEBREWS 9:11–15

### THE CYCLE OF GRACE

Paul offers us a better way of doing things in the cycle of grace. This cycle has three components – know, reckon, and present – which he illustrates to us in Romans 6.



In verses 3, 6, and 9 he repeatedly uses the word “know”, although he uses three different words, in this way showing the progressive understanding of knowing.

In verse 3: “... or do you not know?” This is the Greek word *agnoeo*, which means “to be ignorant.”

In verse 6: “... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with [Christ]” This is the Greek word *ginosko*, which means “to learn to know, or to come to the knowledge of.”

In verse 9: “... knowing that ...” This is the Greek word *eido*, which means to see as a result of revelation and to be convinced.

Paul makes it clear that our victory lies in knowing something. This knowing is a process of understanding that systematically changes our old thought patterns so we can think and live in a new way.

What is this great insight we need to understand? That the old “me” was crucified with Christ on the cross. My inferiority, guilt, shame, and confusion were completely dealt with two thousand years ago. I no longer have to consider myself a poor, struggling sinner, because that is not who I am.

## The old ‘you’ no longer exists because he is dead.

The fact that we still do the wrong things does not make us sinners. Paul says the reason we sometimes mess up is because we still struggle with a slave mentality. The old ‘you’ no longer exists, because he is dead. This is an immense concept that you and I need to know to our core. It’s all about who we are now. The sinful person we once were was crucified with Christ and we now live a new life in Him.

Jesus did so much more for us than just save us. We died with Him and were raised to a new life together with Him. If we cannot see

ourselves with Jesus on the cross, the cross actually means nothing to us. The Bible says we have been crucified with Christ, which is why we are able to think differently about ourselves and about sin:

*For we know that our old self was crucified with him  
so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,  
that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

**- ROMANS 6:6, NIV**

*We perceive that our old lifestyle was co-crucified together  
with him; this concludes that the vehicle that accommodated  
sin in us was scrapped and rendered entirely useless.*

*Our slavery to sin has come to an end.*

**- ROMANS 6:6, THE MIRROR**

Peter says that returning to sin is like a pig that has been cleaned and goes and rolls in the mud again, or like a dog that returns to its own vomit. (see 2 Peter 2:22). Why would you do that?

We suffered with Christ on the cross, and we need to arm ourselves with the thought that we have ceased to sin. 1 Peter 4:1-2 puts it like this: "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." When you know you have been crucified with Christ and raised with Him, you become part of the cycle of grace that Paul continues to spell out for us:

*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin,  
but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**- ROMANS 6:11**

To reckon yourself dead to sin is the Greek word *logizomai*, which is where our word “logic” comes from. Paul is saying that you should come to the logical conclusion that you are able to live a life of victory because you died and were raised with Christ. If you know this for a fact, reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to God. You must know, so that you can reckon, in order to come to the logical conclusion and present your members as instruments of righteousness and not instruments of sin.

The final step – present – means an adjusting of your life; establishing things in your life differently so that you can live for God.

How does the cycle of grace work if you do something wrong? Instead of feeling condemned again, you need to remind yourself of what you know. What do you know? That the action of sin does not reflect who you truly are. That you are definitely not a sinner; you are in Christ a new creation. This is your true identity now. Doing something wrong does not determine your identity. Run to what you know you truly are. You now understand who you are in Christ. You know you have been created to live permanently in intimacy with God and that you shouldn't run from Him if you do something wrong. This is why Paul exclaims:

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those  
who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according  
to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

**– ROMANS 8:1**

You walk in the Spirit by reminding yourself that you have a new identity in Christ and refusing to see yourself as a sinner. You walk in the flesh when you associate yourself with Adam and see yourself once again as a poor old sinner.

When you function within the cycle of grace, there is absolutely

nothing that can breach your intimacy with God, and you are able to declare victoriously, “I have been designed and created for intimacy with God!”

**I have been designed and created  
for intimacy with God!**







# NO MORE EFFORT

In the previous chapter we looked at how the cycle of grace works. Firstly, there is something you need to know to function within this cycle. You must know, and constantly remind yourself, that what Christ did on the cross was a finished work, which means that you are no longer a sinner, but the righteousness of God. You need to come to the realization that you are dead to sin and alive to God.

## **UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE LAW**

In Romans 7, it looks as though Paul completely forgets about the life of victory he spoke about in Romans 6. He is communicating here like someone who does not seem convinced that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ – which is exactly what he later again so convincingly speaks about in Chapter 8. What happened in chapter 7 then? The key to chapter 7 is found in the way Paul begins:

*Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?*

**- ROMANS 7:1**

Paul, who was once a Pharisee himself, knew that the Jews had a deep desire to uphold the law. Many of the Jews turned to Christ for salvation and settled in other parts of the world. Some ended up in Rome, where they wanted to mix their old legalistic practices with their newly-formed faith in Christ. This is why he asks them, “Do you remember how we used to live while we were still under the law?”

In taking his readers back to the time they were still living under the law, Paul reminds me of the story I once heard about a particular statistics honors class. A group of honors students, who were studying in a variety of biological fields, had statistics as a shared subject. Despite the lecturer explaining the work to them to the best of his ability, the students just could not master it. It made no difference how the students tried to apply the formulas to the data, things just would not work out. They worked harder than they had ever worked before and attended extra classes, but by the third term the entire class’s results were still not good enough for them to pass.

The end of the year drew closer and there was not much time to salvage anything positive. They approached their study leaders, and eventually the problem landed on the university management’s desk. To the great relief of the students, the head of the faculty decided to discontinue the subject and declared that the students no longer had to attend class. It was further announced that every student would receive a passing grade for the subject. The students were exempt from the subject, and all the fear that accompanied it disappeared.

Just like it felt completely impossible for these students to pass statistics, the Jews also felt that it was not possible to uphold every aspect of the law. The law merely brought a sense of despair and fear. The Pharisees were so afraid they would break the law that they set other laws in place to ensure they would not break the original law.

One of the classic examples of this was the laws concerning the Sabbath. Obviously the Pharisees believed that they were not permitted to work or do any kind of manual labor on the Sabbath. They had long discussions about precisely what it meant to work on the Sabbath. Work, they said, included plowing, which is why you were not permitted to plow on the Sabbath. The next question was, of course, what it meant to plow. After a long debate it was decided that plowing meant any form of furrowing in the ground. This just led to a further question: what does it mean to furrow in the ground? The Pharisees did not want to take any chances or create any opportunities to falter. They then determined that one was also prohibited from spitting on the Sabbath, because imagine if one spat so hard that it resulted in a small furrow in the ground, which would then mean that one had plowed. And if one plowed, it meant one had worked, and if one worked on the Sabbath it meant the law had been broken. The Pharisees established hundreds of laws for themselves to ensure that their lives were set on fulfilling the law as carefully and accurately as possible. This was as meticulous as one could get.

Paul compares our life under the law with a marriage. He begins Romans 7 by asking, “Do you not know that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?” For example, a man and a woman are bound to each other in marriage until one of them dies. As long as they are both alive, they are committed to each other, as is expected of them within a marriage. When one of them dies, the other

is set free from any obligations towards the partner who has died. Should the surviving man or woman get married to someone else, the commitment they shared with their first spouse would no longer apply and would have no effect on the second marriage.

According to Paul, the law works in exactly the same way. It holds a power over us and places severe claims on us. It is already a challenge to recite the Ten Commandments from memory, let alone fulfill them one hundred percent throughout one's entire life. Paul says that even he himself was not able to fulfill all the laws and the rules the Pharisees added:

*I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.*

**- ROMANS 7:15, NLT**

Paul realized that even if he tried really hard, he would never get it right. It felt to him like he was held prisoner by a power that forced him to do the wrong things:

*For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.*

**- ROMANS 7:19-21**

Paul confirms the same principle of the church in Ephesus:

*We were all part of a common pattern, swept along under a powerful invisible influence, a spirit-energy that adopted us as sons to its dictate through unbelief. Throughout that time everyone of us were warped and corrupted in our*

*conduct snared in a jumble of forbidden lusts, driven by the desires of the senses, totally engaged in an expression of life ruled by mind games; it was as if a twisted passion parented a universal breed of people.*

**- EPHESIANS 2:2-3, THE MIRROR**

The law could not free us from this disgrace. Not because the law was bad – in fact the New Testament confirms numerous times that the law is inherently good – but because man had a problem in fulfilling it. The law’s purpose was to point out man’s failure and inability to obey God and make him aware of his need for a Savior:

*What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.*

*For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.*

**- ROMANS 7:7-12**

Jesus spoke to the multitudes one day to make sure that everybody understood how important it was to uphold the whole of the law and not just selected portions of the law. He told them that whoever broke just one of the law’s commands and taught others to do the same would be called least in the kingdom of God.

## The law came to point out man's failure and inability to obey God and make him aware of his need for a Savior.

In the same way, whoever upheld all the commands of the law and taught others to do the same would be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And just in case anyone thought it was possible at that stage for man to uphold the law or gain the favor of God with their own efforts, Jesus placed his trump card on the table:

*“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

– MATTHEW 5:27–28

It was already difficult to uphold the law, and Jesus was now making it ten times more difficult. He made it clear: it is impossible to fulfill the law. Man was facing a huge dilemma.

### WHAT THE LAW COULD NOT DO

God's plan was never for us to fulfill the law to be declared righteous. The purpose of the law was to show us what sin is and to make us aware of the fact that we cannot help sinning. Paul says that the law actually caused us to sin even more – it awakened sin within us!

*But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but*

*when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.  
And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to  
bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment,  
deceived me, and by it killed me.*

**- ROMANS 7:8-11**

This is where we clearly see the difference between law and grace. Many people are unsure about the message of grace because they think it gives people a free license to sin. The fact is, it is only when you truly understand grace that you realize that grace teaches you to live a new life:

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has  
appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness  
and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously,  
and godly in the present age.*

**- TITUS 2:11-12**

Grace teaches you to live differently – no longer from your own strength or efforts. Something happens to you when you discover that you are a new creation. It was the law that made you aware of sin and actually indirectly pointed you towards sin. A legalistic person's life is dominated by his constant battle to overcome sin. He is aware of every possible thing that could constitute sin and tries to avoid it at all costs. He just about walks on eggshells to make sure he does not sin. The person who flourishes in the grace of God delights himself in God. His whole focus and life is God.

If you drive on the N3 highway between Johannesburg and Durban, you drive past various chicken farms. At one farm there is a huge billboard that reads, "Do not hoot, chickens are sleeping." For the duration of the long drive until that billboard is reached no



driver feels the urgent need to lean on his horn. But the minute the driver sees the billboard it's almost as though the desire to hoot is awakened in him. The rule that says you may not do something is the very thing that makes you want to do it!

God knew there was no way that the law could save us. The law was only there so we could become aware of our sin and in this way awaken in us an urgent need for a Savior. This Savior was Jesus – we could only be redeemed by Him – and this redemption is applicable to everyone regardless of what you have or have not done. Every person who is in Christ is, therefore, totally and utterly freed from his own efforts and attempts.

Paul makes it very clear in this statement:

*Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference ...*

**- ROMANS 3:20-22**

## **THANK GOD!**

Sin had such a hold over people that Paul, in identifying with man's fallen state, desperately cried out: "O, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?" Fortunately he also gives the triumphant answer: "Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 7:24-25, NLT).

Paul described man's condition of hopelessness over realizing that he can never fulfill the law in his own strength (Romans 7), but then breaks open the revelation that he is able to do so in Christ. Man's once-shameful state in Adam is cancelled out, and

Paul describes this new-found joy in man's new life and authority in Christ.

**We no longer measure ourselves against the law, but we continuously refer to our new life in Christ.**

Jesus Christ is our Savior! He died for us and we died with Him so we could be freed from all the rules we had to obey. Just like a wife is released from the requirements of her marriage when her husband dies, we too are freed from our shameful identity in Adam. We have a new identity in Christ, which enables us to now fulfill the legal requirements of the law.

*For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

**- ROMANS 8:3-4**

We no longer measure ourselves against the law, but we continuously refer to our new life in Christ.

### **A POSSIBLE MISUNDERSTANDING**

When Paul tells us in Romans 7 of how he struggled not to do the things that were wrong, people incorrectly think he is referring to himself as a follower of Christ or even a New Testament believer. Paul is actually comparing life under the law with the new life in

Christ here. And in this, we can all identify with him.

When Paul says that he neglects to do that which he wants to do, and does that which he detests, it makes us feel absolutely powerless. Many people still refer to this Scripture when they say, “You know, if Paul, the great apostle, could not even get it right to live in victory, how do you think I’m going to get it right?”

We don’t realize how this perspective has already made such a deep imprint in our belief and theology as a Christian community. We have adjusted our theology to our experience of failure, rather than making the Word of God the foundation and starting point of our lives. But Jesus Christ freed us from the hold of the law. It is this truth we need to know, and the truth, Jesus said, will set us free.

*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

*They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can*

*You say, ‘You will be made free’?”*

*Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”*

– JOHN 8:31–36

**The New Testament is the  
revelation of man’s true identity  
in Christ and our unhindered  
relationship with the Father.**

We no longer find ourselves in the predicament of living under the law. We now live in victory with Christ! The truth is that we have been made free in Christ Jesus. We are the product of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The New Testament does not reveal a new, revised set of rules attempting to contradict the Ten Commandments. The New Testament is the revelation of man's true identity in Christ and our unhindered relationship with the Father.

*Of His fullness we have all received, grace for grace.  
For the law was given through Moses, but grace  
and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

- JOHN 1:16-17

## He is the manifestation of our completeness.

Against this harsh background of the law, with Moses representing man's sentence of guilt, Jesus Christ came and unveiled grace and truth. He is the manifestation of our completeness.

### UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

Some people think it is somehow devout to say, "Oh well, we all have our little vices!" As long as you keep tolerating them, they will stay your little vices. However, it is unwise to keep confessing this because Christ has already accomplished victory over those vices for you and me. The apostle John says it clearly:

*He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has*

*been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him;  
and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.*

- 1 JOHN 3:8-9

Christ has freed us from the law of sin:

*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has  
made me free from the law of sin and death.*

- ROMANS 8:2

When the Bible refers to the law in this verse, it is referring to a power, a government, or an authority. A law is always the extension of a government. The implementation of a law is directly related to the effectiveness or authority of the government guarding over it.

On the South African highways you can clearly see boards marked with the number 120. This means that you are not permitted to drive faster than 120 kilometers per hour. This might well be the biggest revelation that some people may read in this book! Should you drive faster than this and happen to drive through a speed trap, you will receive a fine because you disregarded a law. You can choose to ignore the fine and all the reminders you receive, but it won't take long for the authorities to subpoena you to appear in court. You can still protest against it, but it will result in you being arrested for your crime. That is how it is, in principle, for every country – the law represents an authority or government.

The Bible tells us that there was a power or authority that had control over our lives, the power of sin. Because I am now in Christ, sin no longer has power over me. There is no longer any authority over me forcing me to do what is wrong. My life is no longer controlled by sin but by the Spirit of God. Jesus Christ conquered the power of sin and He is now the final authority over my life. It is,

therefore, no longer me trying to live a better life, but rather me having discovered who I am in Christ and the authority He has given me over sin:

*God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that. The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it. And now what the law code asked for but we couldn't deliver is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us.*

**- ROMANS 8:3-4, THE MESSAGE**

We are now under new management – the management of God's Spirit. The things that sin forced me to do and the power it had over me have now been destroyed. I now live in God's undeserved goodness:

*Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.*

**- ROMANS 6:14, NLT**

The law gave sin its power and awakened the wrong things within me and caused me to do things I didn't want to do, and in the same way I didn't do the things I wanted to. In contrast, grace awakened the desire in me to live right. Yes, I make mistakes sometimes, but I now have a natural desire to do the right things:

*For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.*

– TITUS 2:11–12, NIV

We are not called to argue, debate, or defend a particular doctrine, we are called to reveal the truth. The truth is the discovery of who we are in Christ. This truth makes us completely and utterly free from any false or confused thoughts about how we should live.

### **BEARING FRUIT NATURALLY**

What do you expect to find when you walk through an orange orchard during harvest time? The fresh scent of citrus, of course: the evidence of fruit on the orange trees.

What do you expect to find with people who are born into the new life from above and who have received a new identity in Christ? You expect godly fruit, fruit that is produced naturally and spontaneously through the Christ within.

To bear fruit is different from doing works in response to an external law.

Fruit is something that is produced spontaneously and naturally. The fruit of the spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – are all produced naturally and spontaneously from within us. Works are enforced externally. In order to do good works, you need to set alarms to remind yourself to do them and think out punishments for yourself if you neglect to do them.

We now bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*, which means to think differently. The Vulgate is one of the earliest and most widely used Latin translations

of the Bible. This specific version translated the word “repentance” as “penance.” For centuries, people were under the impression that repentance meant confessing your sins and renouncing them. But *metanoia* means a radical change of thinking. *Metanoia* is actually a compound word, coming from the two words, “together” and “think.” It, therefore, means to think together with God. This is the appeal of the Gospel – to think completely differently about ourselves, our circumstances, and how we live.

Many churches have made penance or confession of sin the foundation of their faith, which binds people once again to guilt and condemnation. The message of salvation calls us to think and live together with God, with the expectation that we will bear fruit spontaneously because His thoughts are our thoughts.

You are now appointed to bear fruit that is fitting for someone who thinks differently about himself. Someone who thinks they are a sinner thinks differently from someone who thinks they are the righteousness of God. See yourself the way God sees you. Paul refers to this in Romans 12:

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

**- ROMANS 12:2**

It is essential that our thoughts are constantly being renewed, otherwise we can easily fall back into the snare of condemnation. Unfortunately, the way we speak and the way we think are sometimes still a reflection of how we saw ourselves before we were in Christ. This kind of mindset will just encourage our old thought patterns instead of focusing on the victory we have achieved in Christ.


As a child, I was afraid of God for years because I was convinced



I needed to regularly do certain things to win His approval. I needed to live right all the time so that He would not become unhappy with me. I was relying on my own efforts to ensure that I went to heaven.

For years, we have preached a message from the pulpit that we are guilty and that God will punish us if we don't change. This results in people becoming anxious and asking what they need to do to avoid God's judgment.

We then offer them the cycle of guilt and tell them that the first thing they need to do is repent. In this case, repentance is not discovering their new position in Christ, but it is rather focusing their energy on their own failure and shame. Of course there is a brokenness evident in someone who realizes he has done something wrong and wants to get his life right with God. There is nothing wrong with this. We cannot, however, stop at just saying we are sorry. We need to discover who we are in Christ and that He has freed us from our old ways of thinking and doing.



**Redemption brings confidence  
because you no longer feel guilty  
and you can experience an  
intimate relationship with God.**

The enemy's plan is to keep you from discovering who you are in Christ at all costs. Identity determines behavior (activity). As long as you believe you are not worthy and can't help sinning, you will continue to disappoint yourself and, as a result, feel guilty and condemned.

Living in victory means surrendering to the work that was done on the cross. You need to know, see, and understand who you truly are and how God sees you now that you are in Christ.


If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. You underwent an

identity change; you are now a completely different person. You are no longer a sinner, but the righteousness of God. There is no more condemnation; there is only redemption. Redemption brings confidence because you no longer feel guilty and you can experience an intimate relationship with God:

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**- ROMANS 8:31-39**

Just like the case of the university management who intervened and provided a solution for the honors students that went way beyond their own limited ability to solve, Christ provided a way for me to be set free from my own limitations and the judgment of the law. It would have been foolish if, after all this, one of the students turned up at the examination venue to write the exam, or doubted the pass mark he was given.



**In Christ, I am once and for all exempt from any effort to uphold the law to gain the approval of God.**

Believe it or not, there are still “students” like this! In the same way, it would be foolish to doubt the finished work of the cross or to try to contribute something towards it. Christ fulfilled the law on our behalf and obtained this complete victory for us. In Christ, I am once and for all exempt from any effort to uphold the law to gain the approval of God.

## CHAPTER 7

# HEIRS OF A NEW TESTAMENT

**T**he year was approximately 1400 BC. Jericho's walls had fallen and the city of Ai had been captured after a second attempt. Rumors concerning what happened in Jericho and Ai had spread like wildfire amongst the Canaanites. The Israelites were in the process of conquering the land God had promised them, and all the nations teamed up to fight against Israel – everyone except the Gibeonites, themselves residents of Canaan.

The Gibeonites heard that there was no one who was able to conquer Israel and they came up with a cunning plan. They disguised themselves as travelers from a foreign land; they wore old shoes and old clothes and carried moldy bread in their bags. They went to Joshua and the people looking worn out and weary and begged them not to kill them but rather to enter into a covenant of peace with them. Without consulting God, Joshua incorrectly entered into a covenant of peace with the Canaanites. After the covenant was finalized, the Israelites found out too late that their new covenant partners were actually Canaanites. God had commanded them to kill all the

Canaanites, but now it was too late to go back on their word. The Gibeonites had avoided death and now had the protection of Israel.

The king of Jerusalem heard that Israel was undefeated and also that the Gibeonites had entered into a covenant of peace with them. The king then decided, along with a few other kings, to declare war on the Gibeonites. On the grounds of the covenant they had entered into with Israel, the Gibeonites asked Israel to stand with them and fight against the king of Jerusalem. What happened that day was absolutely spectacular. God arrived on the scene and told Joshua not to be afraid because He would deliver the enemy into his hand (see Joshua 10:8). God then sent massive hailstones that killed more people than the Israelites could kill with their swords! (see Joshua 10:11).

More than four hundred years later a huge drought hit the land during David's reign as king. David went to God and asked Him why there had been a drought in the land for three years. God simply answered that a covenant had been broken and that Saul had killed some of the Gibeonites (see 2 Samuel 21). God still honored the covenant between Israel and the Gibeonites four hundred years after it was entered into. Even though this covenant was made in a cunning manner and without God's assent, it was still a covenant, and it could under no circumstances be broken.

### **WHEN PARTIES ENTER INTO COVENANT**

In the Bible we often read of God entering into a covenant with people, or people entering into a covenant with each other. The Hebrew word for covenant is the word *berith*, which means an agreement. A covenant was not something you entered into easily or took lightly; it was the holiest and most solemn kind of agreement into which two parties could enter because it was binding until death separated the two parties.

There were certain steps that needed to be followed to enter into covenant:

1. The ceremony would begin with the exchange of cloaks. In ancient Biblical culture, your cloak represented your identity and, in effect, the two parties now represented each other.
2. After that, the two parties would exchange belts and swords as a symbol of protection. So, if you and I were entering into a covenant in this way, the implication would be that all my power and ability was now available to you; should anyone attack you or take advantage of you, it was as good as them doing it to me.
3. The two parties would subsequently cut their palms and press their hands together in order for their blood to mix. They rubbed sand or ash into the wound so that there would be a lasting scar as proof of the covenant.
4. The next step was to slaughter an animal and cut it in two. The two pieces were then placed on the ground and both parties walked around and through them in a figure of eight, the symbol of infinity.
5. The two parties also exchanged names, which once again indicated that they represented each other.
6. The two parties then stood before each other and spoke out blessings and curses over each other – blessings which would follow if they kept the covenant and curses that would be invoked should the covenant be broken.
7. They then enjoyed a meal together. This meal was called the covenant meal and was enjoyed by the respective family members and witnesses.
8. Afterwards, they planted a tree, dug a well, or even built an altar, which would serve as a reminder of the covenant for the generations to follow.

## **GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**

In Genesis from chapter 15 to 17 we are told that God entered into a covenant with a man named Abram. First God promised Abram many descendants, as many as the sand on the seashore and the stars in the heavens. God then entered into a covenant with Abram to confirm that what He promised would take place. Abram needed to bring Him a calf, a goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a young dove and then sacrifice them. God caused Abram to fall into a deep sleep, then blessed him and confirmed that he would possess the land He would give to his descendants.

Later on God confirmed His covenant with Abram and changed his name to Abraham (father of many nations). Since Abraham and Sarai were unable to have any children of their own at that time, this new name with its promise from God meant a lot to them. Sarai's name also changed: where she was once known as the wife of Abram, her new name, Sarah, included part of God's covenant. God placed His covenant name YAHWEH within their new names.

The Jews never wrote God's covenant name, YAHWEH, with vowels, because they wanted to prevent God's name from being used in vain. They, therefore, wrote the name as "YHW", using only consonants. It was this "h" sound that was incorporated into Abram and Sarai's new names – Abra"n"am and Sara"n" – as proof of their covenant with God. From that day on, God chose to be known as the God of Abraham and later also of Isaac and Jacob.

God kept His part of the covenant and gave Abraham and Sarah a son of their own: Isaac, the son of the promise. Abraham's descendants multiplied, just as God had promised. Things progressed and for a while it seemed as if God had forgotten His covenant because the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. But He hadn't forgotten, and a few hundred years later Israel was free from slavery and was on the way to the land God had promised them – the land of milk and honey.

On the way to the Promised Land Moses reminded the Israelites about the covenant God had made with them. He wrote everything down that the Lord had commanded them and built an altar where the Israelites could bring offerings to the Lord:

*Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words."*

**- EXODUS 24:7-8**

In this way, God renewed the covenant He had made with Israel with the new generation. But this was not the last time. In Deuteronomy 28 the process was repeated again and God gave a long list of blessings Israel would receive if they upheld their part of the covenant. Later, as we read on, we see an even longer list of curses that would come over the people if they did not obey everything God had commanded. After everything had been clearly spelled out, Moses told the people:

*Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.*

**- DEUTERONOMY 29:9**

## **THE CONDITIONS OF BLESSING**

All these wonderful blessings were available to Israel on condition that they were fully obedient; fulfilled the law and all its ordinances; and did what was required. If not, they would be cursed. The blessings included that they were the head and not the tail; that they



would be blessed in the field, in their homes, and in every area of their lives. All these blessings, however, were subject to all the conditions laid out in the law, and as we already know, this was impossible for the Israelites to fulfill. Receiving the blessings was, therefore, based on the principle of covenant: each party had a share they had to perform. It was also not something that was taken lightly, and for this reason it was essential that both parties upheld the agreement.

**Receiving the blessings was, therefore, based on the principle of covenant: each party had a share they had to perform.**

This is precisely the problem Israel was sitting with. They did not have the ability to fulfill their part of the covenant, regardless of how hard they tried. As a result of the hold sin had on man, they could not meet the requirements of the covenant. Consequently, the Israelites did not experience too many of these blessings and they needed to protect themselves against the curses. Where the covenant was supposed to be a means to blessing, it had become a means to a curse. The Israelites would have been a cursed nation had it not been for the sin offerings that temporarily covered their sins.

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."*

**- GALATIANS 3:10-11**

The law came to show man that he was an unworthy, fallen being (as a result of the fall) who needed a Savior. In essence it placed a magnifying glass on his sinful nature. This is why Scripture tells us that sin gained entry into our lives when the law was introduced, because only then could man truly realize how sinful he was.

It is important to remember that the law is not bad. It never was. The law is complete and represents God's standard of life. It is God's description of how He wants man to live. The law represents the perfect order of any society. But the law could not make us better people; it came to show us that we could do nothing to improve ourselves to win God's favor. This is why we needed someone to save us.

### **TIME FOR A NEW TESTAMENT**

After years of stumbling and getting up again, and stumbling again and getting up again, there is light at the end of the tunnel when the prophet Jeremiah prophesies the following:

*"The day is coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife," says the Lord. But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the Lord.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest,*

*will know me already,” says the Lord. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”*

**- JEREMIAH 31:31-34, NLT**

The word for “testament” is the Greek word *diatheke*, which means “inheritance.” By contrast, the Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*, primarily indicates an “agreement.” The English translation of the Bible uses the words “covenant” and “testament” as though they are synonyms, but a covenant and a testament essentially differ in meaning. A covenant or agreement spells out what both parties have to do and not do, while a testament or will is a reference indicating who inherits what when someone dies.

**A covenant or agreement spells out what both parties have to do and not do, while a testament or will is a reference indicating who inherits what when someone dies.**

A testament is only valid when the person or testator who drew it up dies. The writer of Hebrews says that the New Testament works on the same principle:

*And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.*

**- HEBREWS 9:15-17**

If Jesus had not died, we would not have inherited the fullness of God. While Jesus was on the earth, He knew there would be a day where He would have to die on a cross on behalf of all men. You could almost say He was born to die. The night before He was handed over to die, He broke bread and took the cup and poured wine for his disciples. After that he announced His death with these words:

*Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."*

**- MATTHEW 26:27-28**

It is easy to understand these Scriptures today because we are able to read and study the New Testament as well as the Old. Jesus' disciples, however, did not understand what He was trying to tell them. In their minds they were simply preparing to celebrate another Passover. The Passover was the anniversary of that night when the lamb that was slaughtered in Egypt brought about their forefathers' freedom from slavery. They probably wondered why, at this occasion, Jesus would say that this was now the New Testament in His blood. They had absolutely no comprehension of the fact that the one perfect price that would affect the salvation of the whole of mankind would take place within a few hours of their hearing this; a deliverance that would legally make every man an heir of God. Everything would change and a whole new dispensation would be announced – the dispensation that the law and the prophets so eagerly awaited!

### **TIME FOR A NEW PRIESTLY ORDER**

In the Old Covenant the priests acted as agents to keep the covenant. The law was the means of keeping this covenant intact. The

priests, therefore, had to know the law and guard over it. Should the covenant change in any way, the priestly order and the law would be forced to change as well.

*For when the priesthood is changed,  
the law must be changed also.*

**- HEBREWS 7:12, NIV**

Up to the time of Jesus, all the priests came from the tribe of Levi and were responsible for preserving the priestly order. This order needed to function in a certain way, and the framework of the order that needed to be implemented was known as the Law of Moses. Amongst other things, this law determined that the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place once a year to offer atonement for the sins of the people. The high priest would do so by sprinkling the blood of a ram onto the ark of the covenant. The Levitical priesthood was by no means authorized to take away the sins of the people; their sins could merely be covered. This is why it was time for a new priest, from a new priesthood, with a new law, that would take away the sins of mankind once and for all.

**It was time for a new priest, from a new priesthood, with a new law, that would take away the sins of mankind once and for all.**

*Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to*

*the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed,  
of necessity there is also a change of the law.*

**- HEBREWS 7:11-12**

The new priest was Jesus Christ, and He was not a priest in the order of Aaron, descended from the Levites. Jesus Christ was a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is the combination of two Hebrew words: *melek*, meaning king, and *tsedek*, meaning righteousness. Melchizedek was, therefore, the “king of righteousness,” the priestly king of righteousness and peace. Melchizedek was a type of Christ, and some theologians believe that he was Jesus Himself.

We read about Melchizedek for the first time in Genesis 14, when he appeared to Abraham and shared bread and wine with him. Melchizedek was the king of Salem (a city whose name meant peace) and the priest of the Almighty God. He blessed Abraham and, out of gratitude, Abraham gave him a tenth of all his money. Melchizedek was notable because he was both king and priest, which was impossible under the Old Covenant. According to Mosaic law you could only be one or the other.

*For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the  
Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the  
slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also  
Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated “king  
of righteousness,” and then also king of Salem, meaning “king  
of peace,” without father, without mother, without genealogy,  
having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made  
like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.*

**- HEBREWS 7:1-3**

Melchizedek was also not part of a priestly order. In other words, Melchizedek did not take over the priesthood from anyone or hand it over to anyone. He also had no natural mother or father. We can, therefore, deduce that he was at least supernatural, and possibly Christ Himself.

Christ became the king and priest in the order of Melchizedek, king and priest of righteousness and peace. Even David prophesied about this new priestly order in Psalm 110:4: “The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’.” Christ is, therefore, not a priest in the order of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi like all the other priests, but He was born from the tribe of Judah, appointed by His heavenly Father as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:1–4).

### **AN INHERITANCE BY GRACE**

The law of Moses, where man was thoroughly aware of his own efforts, needed to make way for grace – the dispensation where the favor of God undeservedly rested on men. The righteousness Christ accomplished for us was made possible by the power of His indestructible life, not because He was born from the correct tribe, as was required by the law of Moses.

*For the priest we are talking about belongs to a different tribe, whose members have never served at the altar as priests. What I mean is, our Lord came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses never mentioned priests coming from that tribe. This change has been made very clear since a different priest, who is like Melchizedek, has appeared. Jesus became a priest, not by meeting the physical requirement of belonging to the tribe of Levi, but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed.*

**– HEBREWS 7:13–16, NLT**

**The moment Jesus died,  
his testament was validated and  
we became the legal heirs of  
everything he left for us in it.**

Jesus, our High Priest, cried out the following words just before He let out His final breath: “It is finished!” His mission to save the world was complete. The agreement or covenant God had with us to fulfill the law had now been declared null and void and a new covenant was entered into, one where blessing was guaranteed through the finished work of His Son. The moment Jesus died, His testament was validated and we became the legal heirs of everything He left for us in it. It is essential to understand that this is the mystery that had been hidden away in God’s heart through all the ages.

On the cross, Jesus bore every curse that had come over us from not upholding the law, and every blessing that was promised to Abraham became part of our inheritance:

*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law,  
having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed  
is everyone who hangs on a tree”), that the blessing of  
Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that  
we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

**- GALATIANS 3:13-14**

All these blessings are part of the blessing and inheritance we received in Christ. The Old Covenant is no longer valid; you are no longer only blessed when you do certain things, you are blessed because of who you are in Christ!



**The old Covenant is no longer valid; you are no longer only blessed when you do certain things, you are blessed because of who you are in Christ!**

The gospel many people preach is still based on Deuteronomy 28, which says that if you do this, then God will do that. But there is no longer any kind of agreement between you and God that stipulates what you must do – you are now part of His covenant of grace. You also no longer have to stare at all the curses in Deuteronomy 28 with fear. Christ became the curse so that you could be blessed. You have inherited all the blessings listed in Deuteronomy 28 without doing anything to deserve it. You will be blessed in the city; and blessed in the field; the work of your hands will be blessed, along with your property and all your money.

### **TENSION BETWEEN THE LAW AND THE GRACE OF GOD**

Many people experience tension regarding law and grace and how they work together. We must remember that we have been taught from a young age to carry out the law. Our framework was the Ten Commandments, and many times we want to hang on to this because it gives us some kind of religious security. But once we understand that the law is not able to contribute to our salvation in any way and also could never cause us to earn God's approval, we open the door to a better way to God.

The law is inherently good, but it is not the foundation of our relationship with God. In fact, if we do not choose to turn away from the law as the basis for our salvation, we will never be free.

*And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

**- 2 CORINTHIANS 3:4-6**

**I “am,” and now I can  
live in that truth.**

We are able to live a life of abundance when we stop trying to earn God’s favor. I am not “doing” so that I can “become.” I “am,” and now I can live in that truth. Until I recognize this, a veil or a covering will remain over my thoughts. We need to discover that the Old Covenant has been declared void.

*But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

**- 2 CORINTHIANS 3:14-18**

This discovery gives me the opportunity to discover the life God intended me to live. I now see – as in a mirror – who I truly am.

He is the mirror image of my true identity, and His glory is now

the definition of my existence. This is the message of the New Testament and also the key to discovering our identity in Christ. Our inheritance is locked up in the discovery of who we really are.

All that we need to do to gain our inheritance in Christ is just believe that we are included in the finished work on the cross. This new life of discovering our inheritance repositions our entire outlook on life – how we think, speak, and behave.

# MIXING THE OLD COVENANT WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

**E**xpect God's supernatural working in your life today and you'll see your life change completely. Our expectations for the future can sometimes be negative and full of anxiety because we focus on our current circumstances. Like Abraham, the father of faith, we need to learn to look past our natural senses and to focus on a new and positive expectation.

The Lord wants to awaken in us a new expectation for the future. This expectation is not based on our performance, but in the confidence that through His Son, God has pronounced His favor over our lives. If our expectation is in line with God's pronouncement of favor, it creates an atmosphere in which the supernatural work of God can become visible in our lives.

In chapter 7 we looked at both the scope and implications of a covenant with God, the idea that He will bless me as long as I do what He says. The focus was on me and my ability to uphold the law to become saved and blessed. In contrast, the New Testament announces what God accomplished through Christ, declaring that I

became an heir when Christ died. The focus is on Christ and what He did on the cross for me.

**The New Testament announces what God accomplished through Christ, declaring that I became an heir when Christ died.**

Unfortunately, some people have the tendency to mix the human requirements of the Old Covenant with the New Testament's framework of grace. This places people under the power of the law once again and negates the power of the New Testament.

## **LEVI AND JUDAH**

As we've already noted, the Law of Moses demanded that all the Old Covenant priests had to descend from the tribe of Levi. They then became part of the priesthood of Aaron. But Christ came from a completely different tribe, and He became a High Priest from a different priestly order.

When you look at the history of Levi and Judah, you realize that it is definitely not a coincidence that Jesus was born from the tribe of Judah and not from the tribe of Levi. It had everything to do with the circumstances in which Levi and Judah were born. In order to understand this, we need to go back to Jacob, the father of Levi and Judah.

Jacob fled from his home and his family and went to work for his uncle, Laban. In Genesis 29 we read that Laban said to him: "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?" (v 15). Laban had two daughters, but Jacob found Rachel the most beautiful. He asked Laban if he could marry Rachel if he worked for him for seven years.

Seven years went by, and Scripture says it felt to Jacob like a

few days because he was so in love with Rachel. The big day finally arrived when he was permitted to marry her. Laban, however, tricked him and gave him Leah, his eldest daughter, as a wife instead. I'm not sure how things worked practically in those days, but Jacob only discovered that he had married the wrong woman after his first night of being married.

Of course, Jacob protested the matter with his father-in-law. Laban explained that it was custom to first give the elder daughter away in marriage, but that he would accommodate Jacob by giving him Rachel as a wife as well. Jacob thus became the husband of two wives – one whom he loved with all his heart and one he barely put up with. The problem was that the wife he loved was not able to bear him children.

It was extremely important for a man in those days to have sons. In order for a wife to gain the favor of her husband, she needed to preferably produce at least three sons. God blessed Leah with the ability to have children. The fact that Rachel could not have children was, therefore, a great opportunity for Leah to win Jacob's love.

We read about this in Genesis 29:32:

*So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The Lord has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."*

Leah became pregnant again, brought a son into the world, and said: "Because the Lord has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." She named him Simeon (meaning "God has taken notice of me"). Again she became pregnant, and brought a son into the world. This time she said: "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." This is why she named her son Levi.

Leah was grateful she was able to bear Jacob three sons because she was convinced that he would now look at her differently. Leah expected to gain more favor from her husband due to the fact that she was able to bear him a third son, Levi. Levi was born as an attempt to earn favor. In the birth and naming of Levi, this principle of performance was established. And this attempt to win love and approval would be continued in the Levitical priesthood.

It was not, however, the end of the story. A new day dawned for Leah:

*And she conceived again and bore a son, and said,  
“Now I will praise the LORD.” Therefore she called his  
name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.*

**- GENESIS 29:35**

She named this son Judah, which means “I will praise the Lord” or “praise.” The birth of this son had nothing to do with her need to perform to gain her husband’s favor, acceptance, and approval. She was so overwhelmed with God’s goodness and grace that she spontaneously began to thank and praise Him. In the naming of Judah, the principle of undeserved favor and grace is established. Levi represents own works and performance, while Judah represents praise and the undeserved favor of God. The difference between Judah and Levi is the exact difference between the Old Covenant and the New Testament.

**In the naming of Judah, the principle of undeserved favor and grace is established. Levi represents own works and performance, while Judah represents praise and the undeserved favor of God.**

*Old Testament = Levi:* Came through the priesthood of Aaron. The power or authority of the Law of Moses lies in the Ten Commandments, which we need to uphold to please God so that He will bless us.

*New Testament = Judah:* Came through Jesus Christ and the priesthood of Melchizedek. The power or authority of the Law of Faith lies in believing that God has already blessed us in Christ.

The reality of this truth is that we do not live according to the Levitical priesthood, where we have to work for God's favor, but rather according to that which our High Priest, Jesus Christ, already accomplished for us. Our calling is simply to respond to this with praise.

Any doctrine which emphasizes good works and man's contribution to ensure salvation is still part of the old dispensation. Trying to uphold the law requires discipline and effort to win God's favor. God's plan of salvation to reconcile us to Himself once again differentiates the true Christian faith from every other form of religion, including the Old Covenant. It is not about man's attempts to win the attention and favor of the Godhead. The Good News is all about how God succeeded in putting an end to the enmity that existed between Himself and man, and to reconcile us to Himself.

*For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

**- ROMANS 5:10**

In the New Testament, there is no question of having to do anything to please God. The only thing that pleases God now is our faith. God accomplished our salvation Himself. Our salvation is not hanging in the balance ... it is already a done deal! God is not still



trying to decide if He is going to save us or not. God's love for us and the fact that He sent His only begotten Son is the foundation of our faith.

By grace, God gave us everything as a gift. It is no longer necessary for us to try to perform to win the favor of God. Indeed, it insults the finished work of Christ if we still attempt to earn it ourselves, for then we are trying to do what Christ has already done for us. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians that if it had been at all possible to contribute anything to our salvation, Christ died for nothing:

*I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.*

**- GALATIANS 2:21**

It is, therefore, not about our diligence, but it is about the finished work Christ carried out for us. This understanding is so much more powerful than exercising our willpower. In the same way that our High Priest from the tribe of Judah replaced the priests from the tribe of Levi, God replaced the Old Covenant with the New Testament. So many Christians still want to contribute something towards their qualification before God through their own spiritual commitment. But the dispensation of the Old Covenant is something of the past, and it is most foolish to still want to live according to it.

Take, for example, the faithful old 286 IBM computer which has been out of use for at least twenty years. This computer had a hard drive memory of 6.5MB and worked at a speed of 10 MHz. In addition, it could take a "floppy" disk that stored a maximum of 8MB worth of data. The computer's total memory was more or less the equivalent of one or two files currently on my computer.

Now, why on earth would I give up my MacBook Pro to work on

a 286 IBM computer? Why would you want to go back to something that does not work for you? As much as it is pointless and foolish to choose an old computer above something that is a lot better, it is pointless to go back to the old dispensation when Christ has made a new way for us. This is why we want to tell the world that God has already accomplished our full salvation. God is not going to do anything else to deliver and empower the world – He has already done it.

Scripture tells us that when the temple of Solomon was being built, there was no sound of a hammer or chisel on the Temple site, because everything had been finished in the quarry. This is the story of our salvation. We don't try to correct people's behavior with hammers and chisels so that they can be good Christians through their committed human labor.

**We need to be freed from  
having zeal for God and discover  
the zeal of God!**

Unfortunately, we often try to make people disciples of Christ by changing their behavior. We like to give people all kinds of helpful steps to get them on the right track ... but our best efforts only bring disappointment once more. We need to be freed from having zeal for God and discover the zeal of God. God completely transformed or recreated us in the “quarry,” or in other words, on the cross. What does this mean? It means essentially that there is no more change needed in your life. We're not going to try to beat you with a hammer and chisel until your life is right. You need to begin to discover and see yourself in Christ – you need to discover your perfection in Him, and then become who and what you already are!

## PAUL ADDRESSES THE GALATIANS

The church in Galatia believed in Christ, but they also believed they needed to continue to fulfill the law of Moses. They really wanted to do all they could to show they were devoted to the Lord, but it resulted in them becoming legalistic.

This is why Paul addressed them so harshly:

*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*

**- GALATIANS 3:1-3**

When Paul finds that the Galatians have fallen into an old mindset, he doesn't hold back! "Who has bewitched you?" he asks. He sounds desperate when he says later on:

*How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone,  
because I am perplexed about you!*

**- GALATIANS 4:20, NIV**

You almost want to stop Paul and remind him that these are actually good people who are devoted to God. But these are the very people for whom Paul despairs. *The Message* emphasizes how strongly Paul feels about this:

*Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what*

*was begun by God. If you weren't smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it?*

**- GALATIANS 3:3**

But why is Paul so angry with them? He wasn't even this angry with the Christians in Corinth who were guilty of unthinkable sexual perversions and who freely challenged each other in court. You would think that if there was a church that needed sorting out, it would rather be the church in Corinth! Something does not make sense – the Corinthians lived in sin and the Galatians were doing their best to live according to God's standards.

The difference was that the Galatians should have known better. Paul was patient with the Corinthians because they were still ignorant concerning their position in Christ, but he was furious with the Galatians because they had been taught more. They knew the truth of the gospel, yet they carried on mixing the legalistic approach of personal performance with the New Testament doctrine of grace.

Perhaps Paul was especially harsh with the Galatians because he had come to the intense realization that religiosity can be more dangerous than blatant sinfulness. The Galatians were saved because they believed, but now they wanted to continue living their spiritual lives by relying on their own efforts. Once again they placed all sorts of customs and requirements on people that served as conditions as to how spiritual they were. Could it be that religiosity is worse than sin? Someone living in sin at least knows he or she is on the wrong track, but religion soothes your conscience, even making you proud and telling you that you're on the right track. You become convinced that living a good life makes you a righteous person. This may sound so right, but it is so wrong!

It is dangerous when someone believes and lives out a mixed

message. On the one hand, you believe Christ has already done everything for you, and on the other hand you believe you still need to contribute something to qualify to be accepted by God.

Yet even the apostle Peter was guilty of mixing the Old Covenant with the New Testament, albeit subconsciously:

*But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision.*

**- GALATIANS 2:11-12, NLT**

Early on in his ministry, Peter had a vision in which God commanded him to eat both clean and unclean animals (see Acts 10:9-16). Peter initially refused to do so, which is why God repeated the command. Peter could then eat the unclean animals because God had declared them to be clean.

Further on we read how Peter ministered the gospel to Gentiles for the first time. He didn't seem to have any objections to eating unclean animals with the Gentile Christians. Later on, however, Peter began to withdraw from meal times with the Gentile Christians because they ate unclean animals. The Jewish Christians believed in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but they also believed they had to obey certain laws, such as not eating unclean animals. Peter knew that nobody could earn God's favor any longer through obeying laws, but he did not want to offend the Jewish Christians by preventing them from following Jewish customs. Paul saw this as mixing the Old Covenant and the New Testament. If these are mixed, the result is dead religion. This is why Paul was so against it.

The danger of mixing the two is demonstrated with a simple chemistry experiment. Bleach has the ability to remove stains from clothing, but sometimes the stains do not go away and all that remains are yellow marks. There is another way of removing stains – by using vinegar. Not many people know about this, which is why it is usually not the first thing you grab when you come across a dirty mark. Imagine for a moment that you'd like to try the vinegar, but you also want to combine it with a little of what you're used to (the bleach) just to make one hundred percent sure that it works effectively. The question that invariably comes up is: can't I just mix the two? But if you happen to mix these two substances, a poisonous gas called chloride gas is formed. It attacks the mucus cells in your eyes and nose, and it can be deadly. And so, if you wanted to combine these two cleaning agents, you would have a highly dangerous product with no cleaning ability.

The law is kind of like bleach in that example. It is something we are used to and something we have been taught to use from a very young age. Despite the fact that you would never get it right to use it properly, at least you feel comfortable with it. The vinegar is like the new plan God set in motion for us. This plan does not require any good works or establish any conditions and is by far the better plan. Yet it seems as though we cannot believe in its perfection and so we tend to quickly go back to what we know – our own ability in an attempt to gain God's favor. We cannot mix our own efforts with the finished work of Christ. Jesus Christ is the only benchmark of God's favor and love for man. Jesus Christ is the worth that God attaches to each person.

**If you realize the value that Christ has placed on you because He is in you, it will radically transform your thought patterns.**

We have tried to tell people for years that they just need to sort themselves out. This is about as helpful as trying to pick yourself up by your own shoelaces. Faith is the fruit of the revelation of who Christ is and what He has done for you. If you realize the value that Christ has placed on you because He is in you, it will radically transform your thought patterns. Salvation is solely by grace, without any contributions from our side. Not even faith comes from us, but God places us in a position to believe, and this is His gift to us. His love for His Son is His love for us; He overwhelms us with the same favor.

When you realize this truth and allow this good news to become established in your heart, faith is something that happens spontaneously – as is the desire to obey God. Legalistic obedience limits you to your own fallible attempts, and it only brings frustration and condemnation with it. Faith is having confidence in the infallible achievement Christ performed on behalf of you and me. The fact that He was obedient even to death affected every man's freedom.

My actions now become the natural fruit of my understanding of the Gospel. My understanding inspires what I do. As Paul pleaded with the church in Galatia to come to deep, fruit-bearing knowledge of the truth, he told them a story from the Old Testament to make the grace of God more comprehensible to them.

### **ISAAC AND ISHMAEL**

God promised Abraham a son, but when it didn't look like it was going to happen, Abraham agreed with Sarah that he would take Hagar as his concubine. The plan worked: Hagar became pregnant and Ishmael was born.

Their joy, however, did not last long because God told Abraham that Ishmael was not the son He had promised. So they waited some more. Ishmael was already a teenager when Sarah finally became

pregnant and gave birth to Isaac, the son of the promise. I can just imagine how much joy and gladness accompanied his birth!

After a two-year period, it was time for Isaac to be weaned, so Abraham organized a huge feast. Before the event, Ishmael teased Sarah about being an old lady with a little boy. Sarah was so angry that she asked Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away.

Abraham tried to calm Sarah down, but she would have none of it. It was a sensitive situation for Abraham. How do you chase your own son and his mother away? Abraham asked God for advice. I can just imagine that it sounded a little like this: “Oh Lord, what must I do? These women are driving me up the wall!”

The answer the Lord gave Abraham was not the one he was expecting. He said that Sarah was right, and that Hagar and Ishmael needed to go because Ishmael could not share in the inheritance with Isaac. In fact, God commanded Abraham to disinherit Ishmael (Genesis 21).

What has this got to do with the Old Covenant and the New Testament? Paul explained it to the church in Galatia:

*I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you. Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children – but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: “Rejoice,*



*O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.” Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.*

**- GALATIANS 4:20-31**

Ishmael was the son of a slave and Isaac was the son of a free woman. The son of the slave was born as a result of Abraham’s own efforts, while the son of the free woman was born as a result of God’s promise (Galatians 4:23). Can you sense the tension? Abraham has two sons. One is the fruit of his own attempt and performance and the other is the fruit of the promise. His two wives represent the two covenants. Hagar, the concubine, represents the Old Covenant that was entered into on Mount Sinai and resulted in slavery. Mount Sinai was the mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments. Hagar and Ishmael allude to the law and slavery. Hagar is also the image of Jerusalem today, and her inhabitants living in slavery (Galatians 4:24–25). Sarah, on the other hand, represents the New Testament. She brought a son into the world without working to accomplish it; he was given to her as a gift! She was not a slave and lived in total freedom:

*But the other woman, Sarah, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. She is the free woman, and she is our mother.*

**- GALATIANS 4:26, NLT**

Paul is comparing the earthly Jerusalem with the heavenly Jerusalem. The earthly Jerusalem is tied to religion and slavery. There are many Christians who tend to go back to the customs of the Old Covenant as if they will somehow bring deeper meaning to their relationship with God. This is precisely what the Galatians wanted to do when Paul rebuked them so fervently.


The spiritual Jerusalem, which is an image of the New Testament church, lives in total freedom. We receive this freedom as a gift by grace because we are in Christ. Wouldn't you agree that the gospel of grace and our inheritance sometimes just sounds too good to be true? This is the reason some believers keep feeling like they need to add something. But you cannot balance grace with something else. Grace is not a concept or a doctrine; it is a person – Jesus Christ!

**Grace is not a concept  
or a doctrine; it is a person –  
Jesus Christ!**

Because of Jesus we are children of the promise and beneficiaries of the New Testament. Paul said this in so many words to the Galatians: “Chase the slave and her son away!” Ishmael and Isaac could not stay under one roof and could by no means share in the inheritance. Our inheritance is locked up in the grace of God, and He does not want us to try to earn it. The gospel of grace loses its power when we mix it with our own efforts. Christ freed us so that we might be truly free. We need to stand firm in this freedom and not be forced under the yoke of slavery again.

Paul says that the smallest amount of yeast can sour the whole batch of dough (Galatians 5:9). He is clearly referring to religious traditions that stem from the Old Covenant, traditions that are counter-productive to their maturity as Christians. The prophetic references

and practices in the Old Covenant were only a shadow of what would be fulfilled in the New Testament. All the Jewish festivals – weekly, monthly, and annually – were completely fulfilled in Christ. We cannot afford to piously hold on to Old Testament customs if we want to celebrate the reality of the New Testament. When we mix the Old Covenant with the New Testament, we render our faith powerless.



**Knowing that we are totally and utterly innocent before God draws us into an intimate relationship with Him.**

The new way asks for insight into the crucifixion of Jesus and an understanding of what He has done on our behalf. This understanding and realization awakens us to grace and causes us to experience joy. Knowing that we are totally and utterly innocent before God draws us into an intimate relationship with Him.

# CHRIST IS THE KEY

If there is one thing every average South African house has in common, it would be a safe. Even though they come in many different shapes and sizes, each one is a secure place to store valuable items such as documents, weapons, jewelry, and even spare keys. A safe is used to protect something of value against fire, theft, and any other potential damage. There is no way of accessing the items in the safe without the key.

In this book, we are in the process of opening up the wonderful gift of grace and discovering the extent of our inheritance in Christ. This chapter will focus on the key that opens up this gift: Jesus Christ. It is impossible to receive the grace of God and experience it in our lives without Him.

In Christ, God revealed His original plan for mankind. He is the center of the Gospel and the One everything revolves around. In order to discover the grace of God, you need to discover Jesus Christ. If there is ever a conversation carried out about grace without honoring Christ, then the conversation is not really about grace, no matter how many times the word “grace” is used.

## A NEW CONVERSATION

The writer of Hebrews begins the book with a striking statement, which he uses to lay the foundation for the thirteen chapters that follow:

*God, who at various times and in various ways  
spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,  
has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.*

**- HEBREWS 1:1-2**

There are two different periods of time spoken about in this passage of Scripture. In the first period God spoke to man through prophets. God shared portions of His mystery with the prophets, like pieces of a puzzle. The prophets then had to communicate this message to the people. These prophecies were pointing to a new era or time period. Many of the prophecies and events in the Old Testament were pointing to the saving work of Christ that would come.

For example, think of the time when Moses carefully explained to the Israelites that they needed to smear the blood of an innocent lamb on their doorframes to spare the life of their eldest child. This was a clue of what would take place in the future. An eldest son would die one day, and his blood would exempt us from death.

God so clearly and consistently communicated this message that the Jews longed for the coming of the Messiah. That day finally dawned, and it was no longer necessary to predict His coming. He became flesh and made His dwelling among us. He was crucified, was raised from the dead, and the New Testament took effect. It is no longer necessary for God to give us clues concerning Jesus through the prophets. What God wanted to say through the prophets He has already said, and that which needed to take place has already taken place. Unfortunately, they did not recognize Him as the Messiah when He made His appearance.

## God chose to pronounce a new verdict over us in His Son.

The prophets represent a period of time that has already come to an end, which is why we cannot expect God to talk to us or work with us in the same way he did with Joseph or Noah. The way in which God worked with the people in that time period needs to be understood in the light of the new conversation He started through His Son. God chose to pronounce a new verdict over us in His Son. It is a new time period, and God came and said something brand new to us. It is the dispensation of grace where we, out of His fullness, receive grace upon grace.

## This declaration God made over us has the capacity to radically change our lives.

The grace of God is available to all people. As Christians, however, we have the ability to better hear and understand this grace than non-Christians, who are not tuned in to it. As Christians, we need to be careful not to listen to this new conversation religiously. We can very easily miss it, just like the prodigal son's older brother did, because we do not understand it. When we listen, the Word of God has creative power in our lives. Words are spirit-vehicles – they make creative energy available. We can pass on the words of God, and these words are like seed that we sow, containing an inherent genetic code. When this seed falls on fertile ground, it has the potential to germinate, take root, and bear fruit. Our words bring forth either life or death.

Today the airwaves are jam-packed with information in full color and sound. It remains invisible and inaudible, however, until we tune

in a receiver to capture it on a specific frequency. The Word of God is the same. We need to tune in our hearts to “receive” this declaration God made over us. Jesus often said to people: “Whoever has an ear to hear, let him hear.” Obviously everyone had ears, but few actually tuned theirs in to hear the true message.

It is interesting to see exactly how an ear is made to enable us to hear. In a series of complicated steps, air, bone, and sound are employed to decipher sound. They work together intensely in the hearing process. It is an absolute wonder of creation that the ear is able to hear everything from the soft ticking of a small watch to the roar of a V6 engine. There are a range of volume adjustments the ear is able to master, and it has the ability to intensify sound up to almost a million times. The ear is an exceptional organ!

A sound is made through something that vibrates, like vocal chords or loudspeakers. These vibrations produce compressed pulses from air molecules bumping against other air molecules. Just like a wave of water, a sound wave cannot simply stop and disappear when it reaches the instrument that will decipher or decode it, or when there is a barrier or obstruction in its path. The sound wave has one of three reactions in this case:

1. It bounces off the object or barrier
2. It deflects around the object or barrier
3. It forms part of the object itself

It is our choice whether or not the words God speaks will bounce off, deflect around, or gain entrance to our hearts. When we read the Bible in the light of what God says about salvation, it becomes a brand-new book in which Jesus says that His Word is spirit and life.

*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.  
The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*

**- JOHN 6:63**

God has always spoken to man. All His words, dreams, and desires for mankind were gathered and accumulated together, and God spoke His heart out in Christ. God made a final declaration to be heard by all people. God could not have spoken to man more clearly than He did when He sent Christ to reveal His heart to us.

**God could not have spoken  
to man more clearly than He did  
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heart to us.**

When we want to hear what God is saying to us we need to listen to what His Son is saying to us. What did God say to us then through His Son? The writer of Hebrews tries to make it clear that the New Testament is not just an extension of the Old Covenant, but rather a brand-new conversation God has started about us:

*But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry,  
inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant,  
which was established on better promises.*

**- HEBREWS 8:6**

I think we get confused with the two different time periods presented in the Bible because they are incorporated into one book. The Old Covenant was simply telling us what would be coming in a new dispensation. The New Testament puts the Old Covenant in perspective for us. Somebody once said that the New is locked up



in the Old and the Old is unlocked in the New – we only understand God’s intentions in the Old Covenant in light of the revelation of the New Testament.

### **JESUS IS THE KEY TO ETERNAL LIFE**

Jesus told his disciples just before He died that He was going to prepare a place for us and, once He had done so, that He would come back to take us there:

*“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”.*

**– JOHN 14:1-6**

This was not, a reference to heaven, as most people think. It almost sounds like Jesus is in the middle of this extensive building project in heaven where teams of angels are busy mixing cement and carrying bricks in the hope the project will be completed in time. Once the project is finished, Jesus will come and fetch us and bring us to this “place” which, to many people, is a tangible place in heaven. The fact is, Jesus does not need to build anything. Our God creates with a word. He does not have to spend two thousand years building a house.

## Jesus went to prepare a place for us in the presence of God.

What is this place that Jesus went to prepare for us and where He will take us when it is finished? Jesus is speaking here about the privilege of being welcome in the presence of the Father. Jesus went into the real Most Holy Place and sprinkled His own blood on the mercy seat so that our sins would be taken away for eternity. Jesus went to heaven and prepared the Most Holy Place – where man had been disqualified from entering for centuries. Jesus went to prepare a place for us in the presence of God. Jesus has already come to fetch us and has taken us to this place, which we see in Hebrews: “Come and approach the throne of grace with confidence!” (see Hebrews 4:16).

Doubting Thomas wanted to know where this place was where Jesus was going. Jesus told him that He is the only key and entrance to the special place He has prepared for us. He is the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (see John 14:6).

### **CHRIST AS THE MIRROR IMAGE OF MY LIFE**

What do you see when you look in the mirror? This is not a trick question. Obviously you see yourself. A mirror is a very honest thing. It hides nothing and always tells the truth.

The Bible says that Christ is a mirror for us. When we look at Him, He shows us what we look like now that we are in Him.

Christ is the mirror in which we can see ourselves the way God

sees us. Look at what this Scripture says:

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

**- 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18**

Paul says we see ourselves when we behold the glory of God. The Greek word for “glory” is *doxa*. When we glorify someone, we speak out kind and favorable words about that person. In the Old Covenant, this word was primarily used to describe the weight of God’s presence. Many times it went hand in hand with the visible or tangible presence of God.

Moses had a taste of this glory. In Exodus 34 we read that he spent forty days and forty nights on the mountain in the presence of God. This was also the time in which he received the Ten Commandments.

After forty days and nights Moses came down from the mountain ready to share everything God had told him with the people. His face shone so brightly from the glory, however, that the Israelites were afraid of him. He covered his face with a veil while he was among them, and took it off when he was in God’s presence.

This is what Paul was referring to when he told the Corinthians that we all need to behold the glory of God with unveiled faces. Moses represented the old dispensation, where people only experienced moments of glory and were very aware how transient these were.

Moses and the law remain a reminder of the Old Covenant and the law’s inability to enable us to see the glory of God. This is why Paul says that when we read the law today as if it is our reference for life, a veil covers us again and we simply become aware once

again of our human shortcomings. But when we turn away from the law and look at the glory of our Savior, we are invited into the freedom of His grace!

*But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

**- 2 CORINTHIANS 3:15-17**

When we become born again, the covering that is over our hearts falls away. We are then able to easily see the glory of God and so discover our true identity. When Christ is the mirror in which we look at ourselves, we are able to see God's glory openly. In essence, glory means God's opinion or verdict – that which He has pronounced. When we look at Christ the mirror, we see God's opinion about us and His godly qualities that we share. When we look into this mirror, our minds are changed and we begin to look more and more like who we really are. When we look at Christ, we don't just see the glory of God, but we see ourselves as God sees us. He came and duplicated in us the very qualities that we see and greatly admire in Him. The grain of wheat died and brought forth a great harvest.

No mirror shows you what you actually should look like or who you could be. A mirror only shows you what you look like now; it only shows you what is currently a reality.

The more we look at ourselves in Christ, the more we begin to look like Him. In his first letter, John says that as Jesus was in the world, so are we in this world (1 John 4:17). It makes so much more sense now that Jesus is not only an example *for* us, but that He is an example *of* us.

In Christian counseling today, the popular approach is to focus on the person's past and history rather than focusing on his identity in Christ. It is as though we are trying to help each other accept our identity as sinners and then try to become better people through psychological practices. If you do not discover your true identity and know who you really are now that you are a new creation, you will continue to be weighed down under the power of guilt and shame and pain.

**When we discover the glory of God, our likeness changes and we experience true freedom!**

When we discover the glory of God, our likeness changes and we experience true freedom! The truth does not lie in unraveling your broken past, but in the revelation of your true identity in Christ. The good news of the Gospel is that you are already who God originally created you to be. This was made possible through the work of grace in His Son, without you needing to do anything in your own strength.

### **CHRIST IS THE KEY TO GOD'S REVELATION**

Every promise God made us has been fulfilled in Christ. Paul says it doesn't matter how many promises God has given us, the answer is "yes" to each one! *The Message* says it beautifully:

*Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus. In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God's Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident. God affirms us, making us a sure thing in Christ, putting his*

*Yes within us. By his Spirit he has stamped us with his eternal pledge – a sure beginning of what he is destined to complete.*

**- 2 CORINTHIANS 1:20-22, THE MESSAGE**

**You don't have to attempt to become like Christ; all you need to do is look in the mirror and see that you already look like him!**

Jesus is the culmination of every promise and prophecy of God's favor. Every possible reference of our lives gets redefined in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. Every expectation man has ever nurtured about himself throughout the ages has been made possible in Christ.


You don't have to attempt to become like Christ; all you need to do is look in the mirror and see that you already look like Him! This discovery results in your faith in God being awakened. Paul says that faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of God. As you discover God's Word and allow it into your heart, your faith in Him begins to grow. God's faith is activated in you through the revelation of Christ and who you are in Him.

Everything God planned and destined for man is revealed to us in Christ:

- We died with Christ;
- We are buried with Him;
- We were raised together with Him;
- We are now seated with Him in heavenly places!

Jesus came to tell us everything God had to say about man; He is the revelation of the new creation. When we look at Him, we

are completely transformed to look like Him. Never allow failure or other people's opinions about you to cause you to believe you are not who God says you are. You are the righteousness of God, and you are empowered daily by His Spirit to discover yourself in Him.



**You are the righteousness of God, and you are empowered daily by His Spirit to discover yourself in Him.**

# FAVORED BY GOD

**E**veryone has a few favorites in life – from a specific chocolate, car, or cell phone brand to a particular TV program. Most people will be able to tell you very convincingly why they prefer one thing over another.

Children are particularly prone to having a favorite toy. It reminds me of the little boy whose favorite toy was his soft, brown dog. The dog was eventually faded and washed out, but he still chose it above any of his other toys. This dog appeared in most of his photographs and went with him everywhere – to church, to the shops, and to bed. It wasn't the most expensive or the best-looking of his toys, but this young owner had singled it out as his favorite. God does not favor us because we are so amazing. In some cases we pretty much represent the boy's drab dog. God, however, has attached distinct value to us.

In the Old Covenant there were specific people who experienced the favor of God on their lives. Consider the patriarch Joseph, who though he was his father's eleventh son, was the favored son. Jacob showed his great love to Joseph by having a special colorful coat made for him. Not surprisingly, Joseph's brothers hated him because their father favored him.



To make matters worse, Joseph shared his dreams with them, which made them even more jealous. He dreamt that he and his brothers were gathering sheaves of wheat and that his brothers' sheaves bowed down before him. In his dream even the sun, moon, and stars bowed down before him. God gave these dreams to Joseph, but because Joseph spoke about them too soon, his brothers decided to get rid of him and sell him as a slave. Joseph then found himself in a few difficult situations, but it was in these difficulties that the favor of God started to show in his life. He was successful in everything he did, and he enjoyed great favor with his Egyptian master, Potiphar:

*And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.*

**- GENESIS 39:3-4**

Later on, after Joseph was wrongfully accused of misconduct and thrown in prison, God's favor continued to follow him. He wasn't in prison very long before the prison warden appointed him supervisor over the other prisoners. One day God gave Joseph the ability to interpret one of the Pharaoh's dreams, and because of that he won his favor as well. He was released from prison and became second in command of all Pharaoh's officials. With the wisdom God gave him, Joseph rescued Egypt from famine. And then, one day his brothers came to buy wheat from him and – not recognizing him – bowed down before him. Joseph's dream had come true! The dream was not only about Joseph, however, but the favor God gave him resulted in an entire nation being saved from famine.

Our second example is that of Ruth, a Moabite woman who also

experienced the favor of God on her life. She married an Israelite who had moved to Moab with his parents to escape a great famine in the land of Israel. After Ruth's husband, brother-in-law, and father-in-law all died, Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, decided to return to the land of her birth. Ruth went with her, adopting Naomi's people and her God as her own.

One day, Ruth was busy collecting sheaves on Boaz's fields. Boaz was a member of her late father-in-law's family and was kind to her, showing her favor despite the fact that she was an unknown Moabite woman. Boaz was a kinsman redeemer – a man with the responsibility of marrying a family member's widow to ensure the deceased member's line would continue to the next generation. Ruth found favor in the eyes of Boaz, and he married her. They were blessed with offspring, and one day Jesus Christ was born from their bloodline. The favor Ruth experienced was again not just for her own benefit, but to give birth to descendants from whose lineage king David, and later Jesus Christ, would be born, bringing salvation to all mankind.

A third person revealing God's favor was Esther. She was a young Jewish girl who went to live with her uncle Mordecai after the death of her parents. King Xerxes was looking for a new wife, and he summoned the most beautiful girls from all the provinces to come to his palace. After a certain period of time, in which the girls received beauty treatments and followed a special diet, he would choose himself a wife from the group. Of all the beautiful women, it was Esther who drew the king's attention and found favor in his sight.

The king fell in love with Esther more than any of the other women and took her as his wife. Shortly after Esther became queen, the king's top-ranked official, Haman, devised a plan to wipe out all the Jews. Esther was her nation's only hope. "Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Mordecai

said to her when they discussed this issue (see Esther 4:14).

It was against the law for anyone to approach the king without being summoned. Esther, however, decided to risk her life and go to ask the king to oppose Haman's proposal to have all the Jews killed. The Jews fasted and prayed for three days before Esther clothed herself in her royal attire and approached the king. Once again, Esther gained the favor of the king: he extended his golden scepter to her as a sign of his favor.

Esther presented her case before the king and again found favor with him. The king decreed that the Jews' lives would be spared and that Haman would be executed. The favor on Esther's life did not just make her queen, but also resulted in an entire nation being saved. David, Daniel, and Gideon were other examples of people in the Old Testament who enjoyed the favor of God in their generations and who experienced a taste of what we would experience in the new dispensation every day.

### **GOD'S WORK OF ART**

Have you ever wished you could experience God's favor in your life? The good news is that now that you are in Christ, God has already shown you grace and favor. Just as the king extended his scepter towards Esther as an indication of his favor toward her, God also extends His scepter of favor towards us. We are now always welcome in His presence.

In Christ, we already live a life of grace, and we no longer have to look forward to a certain time where we will one day experience His favor. The words *favor* and *grace* come from the same root word and mean "to advantageously benefit others, to accept, to give preferential treatment and to find pleasure and delight in their company." When you find favor with someone, you can go to them anytime and talk to them. To be favored by God means that we

receive preferential treatment because He loves us. He takes pleasure in each one of us.

**The good news is that now that you are in Christ, God has already shown you grace and favor.**

Sometimes we may wonder how we gained God's grace and favor while we were still sinners. Just like Ruth, who wasn't even welcome amongst the Jews and yet found favor with Boaz, God showed us His grace without us deserving it. God is rich in mercy and loves us so deeply that He made a way for us to be with Him. He saved us by grace without any help or performance from our side.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that God reconciled the world to Himself in Christ and no longer holds their offenses against them. The core message of the Gospel is that the relationship between God and man has been restored. Now, anyone who is in Christ is welcome in His presence. We never have to feel guilty or condemned. Man is God's heart's dream ...

*His association goes back to before the fall of the world,  
His love knew that He would present us again face to face  
before Him, identified in Christ in blameless innocence.  
He is the architect of our design; His heart dream realized  
our coming of age in Christ and to seal our sonship the  
spirit of His son echoes Abba Father in our hearts.*

**- EPHESIANS 1:4-5, THE MIRROR**

When God thinks about Jesus, He thinks about us; when He thinks about us, He sees us in His Son. God sees His beloved children in Christ, and it provides Him endless joy.

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul uses the word *poiéma*, the word from which the English word “poem” is derived. Some translations use the concept “handiwork” or “workmanship”:

*For we are His workmanship, created in  
Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared  
beforehand that we should walk in them.*

- EPHESIANS 2:10

**We are the proud product of his  
own workmanship, his vision of  
love, his poetry.**

We were created in Christ; each one of us is the unique work of His hands. God regards us as His property; He designed and devised us. We are the proud product of His own workmanship, His vision of love, His poetry.

### **THE LOGIC OF GOD’S LOVE**

Isn't it phenomenal to realize that God reached out to us while we were still far from Him? Why would God do this? What caused God to redeem us and reconcile us to Himself? What motivated Him to go as far as dying on a cross for us? When God looks at us, He sees companionship and love, and that is what motivated Him. God placed value in man. He came and redeemed His own image and likeness in us. God sent Jesus to reveal man's inherent worth. Man's identity is intertwined with God's opinion of him. The preciousness of the blood of Jesus is directly linked to the worth of the item God purchased with it:

*... knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

**- 1 PETER 1:18-19**

Dust is not your origin, nor is it your fate. There is a greater reality about who you are, which is what motivated Him to pay the price. When you begin to understand the love of God, you cannot help responding in love, because love generates love!

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

**- ROMANS 5:8-11**

There is an eternal echo in the heart of every person; God created everyone with the sole purpose of living in an intimate relationship with Him. Golgotha was the means by which this need was realized. The worth He attached to man explains the tremendously high price He paid for our redemption: the precious blood of His Son. The fact that God calls man into a relationship is evidence of His eternal love for us. Our innocence, bought with the blood of Jesus, makes it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. The same innocence that characterized the life of Jesus is now also ours.

**BEARERS OF HIS GLORY**

God's plan was to lift us out of the dust of our sinner's mentality and to introduce us to our true, godly identity. He carried this desire in His heart for centuries, this desire to reconcile us to Himself so we could be His prized possession. This is why the prophet Zephaniah cries out in chapter 3:17: "The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

**Man is the bearer of God's image, likeness, and glory.**

Our true identity cannot be measured by time, status, origin, or gender. Man is the bearer of God's image, likeness, and glory. Every person – regardless of race or background – has equal value, which is why we cannot, under any circumstances, continue to judge people according to external factors. Paul says we no longer know people according to the flesh because, even though we once knew Christ in the flesh, we no longer know Him in this way (see 2 Corinthians 5:16). In Christ, we are all equal before God, and we therefore have no right to deem anyone less worthy. We all have the same Lord, and He is Lord of all and richly blesses everyone who calls on Him.

*For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.*

**– ROMANS 10:12**

Christ came and showed us that the glory of God could take form in a physical body, which is why our bodies are worthy carriers of the glory of God. Jesus did not come to start a new religion. He also did

not come to begin Christianity. People tend to turn the Good News into a religion. But it isn't a religion, it's a relationship. Jesus came to reconcile man to God and to introduce man to his true self. Jesus came to show man how God originally created him: innocent, justified, and a bearer of His glory.

While we were still His enemies, God reconciled us by the blood of His Son. How much more will we not be saved through His life, now that we have been reconciled? God took the first step to restore our relationship between Himself and man. He took the initiative and first proved His love for us. We now have the choice whether to love Him back or not. God is the source of love, not man. When His love is in me, it flows back to Him and to the people around me. This means that I can love effortlessly, without even trying. His love in us awakens our love for Him and for others.

God created each of us as a unique work of art with the sole purpose of experiencing His favor and grace so that we can be bearers of His glory. God's grace reconciled us to Himself, and that reconciliation had two primary consequences: it restored intimacy between ourselves and God and it restored our power and authority as rulers.

**As a result of our intimacy with God being restored, we are free from the guilt and shame which enslaved our lives.**

As a result of our intimacy with God being restored, we are free from the guilt and shame which enslaved our lives. Guilt and shame are the products of sin that robbed us of intimacy with God. The reality is: if you feel guilty and ashamed, you will never feel free or confident to be in His presence.



Christ's proclamation – "it is finished" – is the receipt, the proof of payment verifying that our debt with God has been paid off. We are eternally exempt from our debt because Someone else paid it on our behalf. There is, therefore, no longer any reason why we cannot enter His presence freely and confidently. We owe Him nothing; the debt has been settled for us! This is what it means to be acquitted or justified.

### **GOD WANTS TO OVERWHELM US WITH HIS GRACE**

What is the implication of our redemption? It means there is no further condemnation for us. Christ does not feel guilty in the Father's presence because He did nothing about which to feel guilty. The same applies to you: you have nothing to feel guilty about because Jesus accomplished full redemption on your behalf.

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

**- ROMANS 8:1**

In Romans 8, Paul describes how God has given us everything. He did not even spare His own Son, but He did everything and gave everything to have a love relationship with us once again. To confirm our innocence, Paul asks the following question: "Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one – for God himself has given us right standing with himself." (Romans 8:33, NLT).

**God invites us into a relationship without borders – unimpeded, unlimited, and unbroken.**

Every accusation against man has been cancelled. God invites us into a relationship without borders – unimpeded, unlimited, and unbroken. Nothing could ever happen to undo this relationship ever again. Nothing man could ever do could separate him from the love of God.

When you discover this truth and realize who you really are, you begin to live differently. You are now innocent because you are the righteousness of God. This truth unlocks the grace of God and makes it visible in your life. Can you imagine what the impact would be if you discovered the grace of God and the full truth about your identity? Could this not be the very reason why you are alive at such a time as this – the reason you find yourself in your city, amongst the people you interact with every day?

You are God's favorite! May the grace of God touch the lives of many people through you.



# ENTER THE REST

**L**et us reflect on the essence of the Gospel. So often it is presented as a framework of Christian values and certain things we have to do to qualify for the favor of God. Heaven is presented as the reward for our devotion. We are, however, no longer in the process of playing spiritual “Chutes and Ladders.”

We have discovered that the Gospel is so much more than an attempt to qualify for the privilege of going to live in a beautiful place one day. Naturally, heaven implies the privilege of enjoying the continuous and uninterrupted pleasure of God’s glory, and every believer looks forward to that. But there is so much more to the Gospel, because the good news is that we can already partake in the glory of God.

The concept of the Gospel means good news. And for good news to be good news, it really must be good news! The foundational Scripture we looked at to explain the good news was Romans 5:17:

*For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*

If you study the “much more” references in the letter to the Romans, you will discover that “much more” really does mean just that – “much more”!

## Christ is now the definition of my true identity – of who I am.

Adam experienced a certain quality of life before sin got a hold on him. His sin caused man’s quality of life to drop to a lower level – a life of inferiority and limitation. Yet “much more” took place! What does this life of “much more” mean? It means that Adam is no longer my frame of reference for how I should live. Adam is no longer the standard against which I measure myself. My life is measured against a new standard: Christ Jesus. Christ is now the definition of my true identity – of who I am. In Romans 8, Paul says:

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

– **ROMANS 8:29**

The Bible is not about understanding and trying to pursue certain guidelines in an attempt to better myself. It is not a showcase of something I have to try to obtain. The Bible is a mirror that reveals to me who I already am. The Bible reveals God’s complete verdict spoken over us, as revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ. When you discover yourself in the full glory and full identity of Christ, you begin to experience the glory of God over your life and abundant life becomes a reality for you. This new identity is the foundation of your core being. If you think differently about who you are, you will think differently about how you live.

**If you think differently about who you are, you will think differently about how you live.**

### **IDENTITY DETERMINES BEHAVIOR**

This principle is spelled out for us so clearly in the account of the twelve spies of Israel. They had to go and spy out the land of Canaan and deliver a report on how Israel should take possession of the Promised Land. God had already appointed this land as their inheritance, and they now needed to respond in faith to take possession of it. However, they forfeited their inheritance for an entire generation because their opinion of themselves was extremely negative. They saw themselves as grasshoppers in comparison to the inhabitants of the Promised Land. And the fact that they saw themselves in this way determined their behavior.

*But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."*

**- NUMBERS 13:31-33**

**Our new life in Christ is a life of abundance and rest for every believer.**

This same inferiority complex continues to keep believers away from the fullness of the “promised land” experience of the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews refers to this as God’s rest. The Promised Land was a place of abundance and rest for Israel and it was a shadow of the reality of the New Testament. Our new life in Christ is a life of abundance and rest for every believer. We must not, however, live in the same disobedience or lack of faith, and in this way miss out on what God has already established for us.

*And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

**- HEBREWS 3:18-19**

Caleb was one of only two spies who did not allow themselves to be intimidated by the giants. He tried to convince the people that what God had promised them should not be influenced by their natural senses. He encouraged them to go and possess the land as their inheritance.

*Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.”*

**- NUMBERS 13:30**

The people, however, chose not to do so and paid the price by spending forty years in the desert, the time it took for an entire generation to die off. God rewarded the dedication of Joshua and Caleb, however, and of all twelve spies they were the only ones who later had the privilege of entering the Promised Land. The Lord gave Caleb a promise:

*But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.*

- NUMBERS 14:24

## ENTER THE REST

We enter into this rest, or promised land, when we accept by faith the verdict God has spoken over our lives. This verdict is what God came and said to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. It is in Christ that we discover our full inheritance; He is the origin of all reality.

**It is in Christ that we discover  
our full inheritance; He is the  
origin of all reality.**

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

- JOHN 1:1-3

Christ, the Word, became flesh and made His dwelling among us and we beheld His glory and received grace upon grace out of His fullness. God sent His eternal Word into this world so that we could come alive to His original created purpose for our lives – our original design. God made us alive to this life in His Son. We place our trust in God's verdict that gives us access to His rest, which He intended for us.

*For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains*



*therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

**- HEBREWS 4:8-12**

This is why Scripture tells us we can enter this rest, because there remains a rest for God's people. Just like the Israelites needed to grab hold of the Word and believe it, that remains the foundation of experiencing this rest today. How do we enter this rest? By discovering and believing the finished reality of the Lord.

### **AS GOD RESTS, SO DO WE**

Like God, we can also enter a Sabbath rest. The first question is how does God rest? The concept of rest refers back to what happened in the account of creation in Genesis. Scripture tells us that God created everything in six clear dispensations, or days. God "worked hard" for six days by creating everything, including man and woman. But on the seventh day God rested (Genesis 2:3). This was certainly not because He was tired from the previous six days of hard work. God cannot get tired; He is the source of eternal energy!

*Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.*

**- ISAIAH 40:28**

*Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

**- PSALM 121:4**

What does this rest, into which God entered and which we have been invited to experience, mean for us? I believe the key lies in Hebrews 4:12:

*For the word of God is living and powerful,  
and sharper than any two-edged sword ...*

God created with His word. He simply said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He sent His word with the absolute conviction that it would accomplish the purpose for which it was sent. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 1:3 that God holds everything together by the word of His power. God's Word is His power. The Amplified Bible puts it like this:

*He is ... upholding and maintaining and guiding and  
propelling the universe by His mighty word of power.*

**- HEBREWS 1:3**

It is not the power of His word; it is the word of His power. There is a substantial difference. Let me use the following example to explain: If I tell you I'm going to hit you with the power of my arm, I am then referring to the power that is locked up in my arm. But if I tell you I'm going to hit you with the arm of my power, I am then saying that my arm represents and facilitates the focused release of my full power and my full ability. When the Bible says that God holds everything together by the word of His power, it means the Word of God represents His full power. We know this Word was with God, and the Word was God, and all things were made through Him, and

without Him nothing was made that has been made. And we beheld His glory and we discovered that Christ was the Word of God.

**As we discover Christ,  
we discover God's Word which  
is his creative declaration or  
verdict over our lives.**

As we discover Christ we discover God's Word, which is His creative declaration or verdict over our lives. Within this insight and revelation we enter into God's rest with the absolute conviction that God's Word will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it in our lives. Hebrews 4:12 goes on to say:

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

The Word of God is living and active, bringing division between soul and spirit and judging the heart. When we truly understand the implications of being included in His inheritance, it causes a division between the limited realm of the soul and the unlimited dimension of the spirit. We are thus enabled to discern or distinguish between soul-based references and spiritual reality. We are empowered to step away from the limited realm of the soul into the unlimited dimension of the spirit. We are launched out of the limited reference of the soul's demands – the thoughts and intents of the heart – into the uninhibited environment of life in Christ as God intended. We enter God's rest by discovering and believing the finished reality of the Word. In Him we live and move and have our being.

The Israelites could not enter this rest because they did not believe. I, however, am able to enter into this inheritance through faith in the finished work of Christ. When Jesus was tempted in the desert He resisted the temptation by saying: “it is written” (see Luke 4:4, 8, 10). The book of Luke uses the Greek word *logos* here. On the fourth time, however, Jesus’ counter statement is translated as: “it has been said” (Luke 4:12). This is the Greek word *rhema*. *Logos* indicates more the general, written word of God and *rhema* indicates the revealed word, when the word becomes alive to us. It would seem that Jesus – the *logos* – continued to identify Himself fully with God’s original verdict until it gained a foothold in His spirit and He could speak out a *rhema* word (a fresh, Spirit-inspired revelation word). The Bible says the enemy then left Him.

**Christ has done everything  
on our behalf so that we can  
live a life of victory.**

We place our trust in Christ and we confidently declare His word over our circumstances. We are no longer intimidated by what our senses tell us, because we have experienced how the Word brings division and distinction in our lives as we now live by the Spirit.

Christ has done everything on our behalf so that we can live a life of victory. He meant it when He cried out: “It is finished! We have been destined to live in this framework of “it is finished” for all eternity, and our desire is for every person to make this discovery. This is the message of good news for every person on this planet!

We start at the finish.

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– Alan Platt



# ALAN PLATT LEADER AND FOUNDER: DOXA DEO

**A**lan Platt is an agent of transformation in the lives of individuals, local churches, and corporate structures of society.

Alan has been in full-time ministry since 1983, and under his leadership Doxa Deo has been established as a strong and effective model for reaching cities with the gospel of Christ.

In Tshwane (Pretoria, South Africa), Doxa Deo serves 30,000 people (referred to as partners) in twelve campuses (local churches functioning as one integrated church in the city). Doxa Deo also has churches in five other cities in South Africa as well as churches in London (UK), Auckland (NZ), and Stuttgart (Germany).

In order to impact society, Doxa Deo has established educational institutions (from pre-school through to high school) in which the next generation is educated in Christ-centered education. Their influence in education also reaches the public schools by placing school workers in schools to minister to the children enrolled there.

POPUP, a skills training center, has been established not only to train people vocationally, but also by offering counseling and medical, dental, and eye care services to the students. In addition, Doxa Deo also has several orphanages to reach out to babies who are infected with HIV, who are abandoned, or who have special needs.

Through the City Changers Institute people are trained in the areas of church, education, society, and business. The City Changers Movement facilitates greater integration and synergy between the kingdom initiatives in different spheres of society.

Alan's primary gifting is leadership and teaching. His capacity to communicate with small groups as well as large crowds makes him a sought-after speaker across the globe. His material on the finished work of Christ as well as on the church and on city transformation has impacted many people, leaders, and ministries. This is Alan's first book.

Alan is married to Leana and they have two children, Duncan and Amy.



More of Alan's thoughts are available at [www.alanplatt.org](http://www.alanplatt.org).



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THE DAY JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS, HE SAID: "IT IS FINISHED!" JESUS ACCOMPLISHED A COMPLETE VICTORY ON THE CROSS AND WE SHARE IN THAT VICTORY. OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE AN ENDLESS GAME OF "CHUTES AND LADDERS" – OUR STARTING POINT IS THE VICTORIOUS DECLARATION OF JESUS JUST BEFORE HE GAVE HIS LAST BREATH.

JESUS CHRIST PAID A PRICE THAT WAS MORE THAN SUFFICIENT TO REPOSITION MANKIND TO LIVE LIFE ACCORDING TO GOD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN. HOWEVER, SO MANY GOOD CHRISTIAN PEOPLE CONTINUE TO LIVE IN A WAY THAT REINFORCES THE CONVICTION THAT WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN SALVATION. MAN – IN HIS FALLEN STATE – IS NEVER GOING TO GET IT RIGHT ON HIS OWN.

## THE GOSPEL WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE ABOUT WHAT WE SHOULD DO FOR GOD, BUT WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US.

*Not Do, But Done* WILL TAKE YOU ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY OF THE FULL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST AND HIS MESSAGE OF GRACE. DISCOVER THE REAL GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL AND THE FACT THAT YOU ARE INCLUDED IN IT.



alan platt

**ALAN PLATT** IS AN AGENT OF TRANSFORMATION IN THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS, LOCAL CHURCHES AND CORPORATE STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY. HE HAS BEEN IN FULL-TIME MINISTRY SINCE 1983, SERVING THE CHURCH ON VARIOUS LEVELS. UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP, DOXA DEO HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED AS A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE CITY-REACHING MODEL. IN TSHWANE (PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA) DOXA DEO SERVES 30 000 PEOPLE (REFERRED TO AS PARTNERS) IN TWELVE DIFFERENT CAMPUSES (LOCAL CHURCHES FUNCTIONING AS ONE INTEGRATED CHURCH IN THE CITY). THIS MINISTRY HAS ALSO ESTABLISHED CHURCHES IN FIVE OTHER CITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA, AS WELL AS THREE INTERNATIONALLY (LONDON, UK; AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND; AND STUTTGART, GERMANY).

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