

A Covenant of Grace – 2-14-10

I said that this morning we'd begin to look at the meaning of the grace. It's a foundational concept in New Covenant life. In the new covenant, grace and the Holy Spirit go hand in hand. If we consider grace apart from the Holy Spirit we are taking an old covenant view of grace.

Traditionally, from the perspective of the Protestant reformation, how is grace defined? It's defined as "God's unmerited favor." We did not deserve to get in, but because of Jesus' death we can, through faith in Him, enter into His kingdom. That, in and of itself, is correct. But grace is not limited just to getting in. If it is, would we need grace any more once we're in? No we wouldn't. How many here need grace each and every day? We all do! I wonder then why we so limit our thinking concerning grace to just getting in. And given that, is it any wonder that so many get stuck right there and perpetually recycle the getting-in experience?

Through a limited perspective of grace most Christians have this experience. Grace got them in. What then are they asked to do once in? Follow the rules. Submit yourself once again to law which is submitting yourself once again to the old covenant. You're then judged by a standard which the law (whatever it is) imposes. And what inevitably happens is backsliding, followed by the need to repent and get in again, to experience the joy once again of getting in by grace, the unmerited favor of God. (Born again again)

But the new covenant does not describe grace as just the power to get us in. It is that, but it's also the power to keep us in and to equip us to be emissaries and operatives of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus came in the power of grace to destroy the work of the evil one. We are called as his people to do the same. Where satan sows disease, we bring wholeness. Where he brings poverty, we bring the riches of heaven. We're called to plunder the devil and to take back what he has stolen. How do we do that? It's by the power of grace.

We come into the kingdom by the power of grace so that we can function in the kingdom by that same power. But we won't walk in it if we limit our understanding of grace to unmerited favor.

The truth of the matter is that the grace we receive is merited. Who earned the grace that we receive? Jesus did. And we are in Him because of grace. There is merit in that place, His merit! Just as His righteousness is imputed to us, His merit is imputed to us as well. And because of that we have an inheritance in Him that He has earned, that He has won for us, but will we ever access it if all we think we're worthy of is scooping up the crumbs underneath His table. No, the feast is ours! The kingdom is ours! The riches of heaven are ours! We access them by grace! But we won't even scratch the surface of that potential as long as we're stuck in an old covenant mentality of grace.

Let me give you a new covenant definition of grace. Grace is “the empowering presence of God through the Holy Spirit.” If we consider grace apart from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit then we are taking an old covenant view of grace. We are the people of the New Covenant and as such we are a people empowered by grace.

A chart comparing the old and new covenants:

	Old Covenant	New Covenant
Authority:	Law (Romans 7:1-6)	Holy Spirit
Age Governed:	Present Evil Age (Galatians 3:19)	Kingdom Age
Means of Performance:	Flesh (Human Nature Apart from God, Self)	God In Us
Power Released:	Sin	Grace
Judgment Imparted:	Condemnation	Righteousness
Result:	Death	Life

Let’s enumerate the characteristics of the old covenant:

- 1) The old covenant was conditional. God was not obligated to keep His side of the deal unless the children of Israel did their part. God said you keep my commandments, and after you have done that, I will be your God and you shall be my special people.
- 2) The old covenant was external. It was written on tablets of stone and it required external acts of obedience. Here it is. You read it. Memorize it and then do your best to keep it. There was only one problem. Man’s best wasn’t good enough to meet the requirements.
- 3) That’s because the burden of responsibility was upon man, not on God. It’s not as though the commandments weren’t good. They were good and holy and spiritual. But man in and of ourselves can never perform what God requires.
- 4) The law functioned to identify sin and to judge us when we transgress. Under law we’re judged by a standard which the law (whatever it is) imposes. In the old covenant what was the price exacted by that judgment? It was death!

So the old covenant is framed around what man can do for God and what God would do in response to man’s obedience. But the new covenant is built upon what God has done for us.

The new covenant is a better covenant based on better promises (Heb 8:6). It’s not at all like the old covenant. This new covenant is not conditioned on our performance or on our obedience. It’s not based on what we can do for God, but rather on what God has and does and will do for us. The new covenant is not written externally on tablets of stone but rather is written on our hearts by the empowering presence of God the Holy Spirit.

We need look no further than the old covenant promise of the new covenant to see that:

Ezekiel 36:27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Ezekiel 37:14

14 I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD.

Unfortunately, though, the vast majority of Christians are not living empowered new covenant lives on the earth. Why is that? Well, what happens whenever anyone renewed by the new covenant submits themselves once again to the old system? They try to follow the rules, stumble, backslide and feel the need to repent, and get born again again. After all, getting in was their greatest experience of the grace of God and so they want to experience that over and over again.

But the new covenant doesn't describe grace as just the power to get us in. It is that, but it's also the power to keep us in and to equip us to be emissaries and operatives of the kingdom of God. We come into the kingdom by the power of grace so that we can function in the kingdom by that same power. But we won't walk in it if we limit our understanding of grace to unmerited favor.

The truth of the matter is that the grace we receive is merited. Who earned the grace that we receive? Jesus did. We are in Him because of grace. There is merit in that place, His merit! His merit is imputed to us. And because of that we have an inheritance in Him that He has earned, that He has won for us. But we will never access it if all we think we're worthy of is scooping up the crumbs underneath His table. Rather, in Him, the feast is ours! The kingdom is ours! The riches of heaven are ours! And we access those riches by grace! But we won't even scratch the surface of that potential as long as we're stuck in an old covenant mentality of grace.

For next week read – Ephesians 3:1-5