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# The Practice in the New Covenant: Part 1

Galatians 2:20; 5:6<sup>10</sup>

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## Introduction

Think with me for a moment about a mechanical watch...

Outwardly the hands move around the face keeping proper time...

Inwardly there is a complex mechanism powered by a spring or motor that causes the hands to move...

The Christian life is quite like that. In the New Covenant, God has made it possible, no more than that, has ensured that His people will be pleasing to Him.

He has placed His Word in our hearts by giving us the Scripture

He has placed His life in our hearts by giving us the Spirit.

This is the essence of the Christian life in the New Covenant. We have the Word of God and the Spirit of God so that we are pleasing to God by believing God in an obeying way.

All truth affects living. What you believe determines how you behave and what you feel. It drives your actions and affections.

Over the last two talks on the New Covenant, we have been intentionally making connections between what we believe and how it affects life. Now I want to say this carefully. We are not saying that if you believe these things, then this is how you ought to act and feel as though it were possible to believe something and behave differently. James is clear this is not how God designed us to work. However, the Bible does make connections between what we believe and what that belief will or will not produce. It often states these as commands or in "ought" language. The effect is that if you do not act and feel as the Bible says you ought or you will, then you only know what those truths are but you do not believe them.

As we will see, this idea of faith as believing God in an obeying way will be essential for daily living as a New Testament believer.

*I originally planned to preach this as a single sermon. However, to preach it all at once would not serve you well. Therefore, this sermon will be preached over two weeks. I am uncomfortable with doing it this way, but the providences of God and the size of the material makes it wise and useful.*

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## **Which Comes First?**

Many truths in the Bible are very simple to say. Most truths of the Bible are difficult to understand.

Jesus loves me... easy to say, deeply profound, almost beyond our understanding.

God is sovereign... easy to say, deeply profound, difficult to understand.

This leads me to make several observations that will help us as we explore the practical effects of what God has done through Christ for us in the New Covenant.

### **You must know *in order* to believe.**

You cannot believe what you do not know. This is very simple. If you have never heard of God, or the Bible or the gospel, you cannot believe it nor in it. This is why we evangelize, preach, teach, exhort and so on.

This is a great tragedy among Christians today. There are many important truths that are not known, not taught and therefore not believed by the average Christian. They do not read their Bibles and they sit under ignorant preaching. Sad.

This is true with the gospel in our salvation. It is true with the gospel in our transformation. The gospel, that is, the death of Christ according to the Scriptures, His burial and resurrection of Christ according to Scriptures, is absolutely what must be known and believed.,

### **You must believe *in order* to understand.**

Many people want to understand in order to believe. This is backwards. This is not the order God has established. You cannot spiritually understand truth until you believe that truth. Faith precedes understanding. Now, notice that I did say, knowing comes before believing. And believing comes before understanding.

It is necessary to believe a truth even when you do not understand it. If the Bible gives a truth or a command, they must be believed. Once you have believed the truth or the command, you will begin to grow in your understanding of it.

If you wait until you understand, you will never believe. This is why the skeptic, the critical examiner will never believe. Since believing also involves submitting to the one who speaks, then believing what God says in His declarations and demands requires your submission to Him.

### **You must keep on believing *in order* to grow in understanding.**

Once you begin believing what God says, you have the opportunity to grow in your understanding of what God says. The minute you deny a truth, you will stop growing in your understanding of a truth.

### **You have to believe a truth or command in order it to function as God designed.**

Faith is essential. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Why? Because believing what God says, His truth and His commands, is how you will function in a way that brings God delight and pleasure.

**You *do not* have to understand a truth or a command in order for it to function as God designed.**

We want to grow in our understanding of what God says in His Word. But we **MUST** believe what God has said. When we believe God's truths and commands, then we will begin to be changed. But we do not have to understand those things in order for them to function God's way.

This is easy to illustrate in our common, everyday life.

Suppose you are sick. The doctor says what is wrong with you. A medicine is prescribed. You are told to take it and your illness will be resolved.

- If you do not believe your doctor, you will not take the medicine and it will not do its work.
- If you do not believe the medicine will do its job, you will not take the medicine and it will do its work.
- If you do not obey the doctor's directive and take the medicine, it will not do its work.
- If you believe the doctor's diagnosis and obey the doctor's directive you will take the medicine and it will do its work.
- The medicine will do its work even if you do not understand how it does its work.

Okay, wonderful, you say. Most of this is fairly obvious. So what has it got to do with this sermon? Well, this actually has to do with all reading and hearing of the Bible, of sermons, of teaching, of counseling... But, I wanted to take the time to say this today because *I am going to say some truths today that you must believe and will probably not understand*. If you say, "I do not understand that so I will not believe that" then you will go on struggling and losing against sin. You will not have believed in an obeying way the Biblical, New Testament truths and commands grounded in the New Covenant.

Many of the things that I will say today and next Sunday are things I do not fully understand. I hope to as I continue to grow in grace. However, I believe them. I hope you will learn of them and will believe them so that they will do what God has designed these truths and commands to do. As you believe them and obey them, you will grow in your understanding of them.

So let us move into the Word of God, hear what God is saying to us, and believe in an obeying way so we will be transformed and will grow in understanding.

## Hearing and Heeding Core Texts

Let's begin with a brief overview of some core texts that define the Christian walk in the New Testament

### **We are to live by faith.**

In the New Covenant, God has placed His Word in our hearts. This highlights faith as essential to Christian living.

#### **Colossians 2:6-7**

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

We received Christ by believing and bowing, we are to live by faith. The Lord Jesus is to be at the center of our life. We are to be settled in the truth we have taught by the Apostles in the Scriptures so that our lives are overflowing with gratitude.

#### **Galatians 2:17-20**

<sup>17</sup> But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! <sup>18</sup> For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. <sup>19</sup> For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Though we continue to live in this world in our fleshly bodies, we now have the life of God through the Spirit in us. So, we must live now by faith in Christ; that is, by believing, trusting, resting, submitting to the Lord Jesus.

#### **Hebrews 3:18-19**

<sup>18</sup> And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

In challenging the New Testament believers to continue on in the Christian life, the author of Hebrews reflects on this very important principle and illustrates it from the time Israel failed to enter the Promised Land, before the 40 years in the wilderness. They were disobedient (v. 18) because they disbelieved (v. 19). They did not believe God's promises and so disobeyed God's precept. Chastening therefore followed.

#### **Galatians 5:5-6**

<sup>5</sup> For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Here is the sum of it all: Nothing matters but *faith working through love*. There are three aspects worked out in our Christian life:

<b>Future</b>	We are waiting eagerly for the righteousness that we are looking forward to attain. This future aspect is through the Spirit and by faith.
<b>Past</b>	We recognize that the Old has been fulfilled and is now finished. Therefore we do not rely on what the Law required.
<b>Present</b>	Faith is working through love so that the future hope is producing practical godliness in our lives.

## **We are to walk in the Spirit.**

In the New Covenant, God has placed the Spirit in our hearts. This highlights the importance of the presence and power of the Spirit for the Christian life.

### **Romans 7:4-6**

<sup>4</sup> Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. <sup>5</sup> For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

The new way of the Spirit is the power for Christian service and ministry. We must not merely say this is so; it must actually be so. Is all we do in ministry the outflow of the life and power of the Spirit in us? Is the Spirit motivating and empowering what you do?

### **Romans 8:1-17**

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

<sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God

are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

As a result of the Spirit coming into our inner being, we are now made alive in the Spirit and have a new source of life in these physical mortal bodies. Therefore, we no longer are empowered by or enslaved to the rebellious impulses of the flesh but rather are submitted to the person and power of the Spirit. These *truths* transform us. This is the reality that we are to believe by faith. When we believe it by faith, we will bow to the Lord by the grace of the Spirit.

### **Galatians 5:16–26**

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now **the works of the flesh** are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But **the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

<sup>25</sup> If we live [are alive] by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Here is the truth we all need. It is rarely taught with the degree of spiritual importance it deserves. “Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” There are the idolatrous, rebellious desires of our hearts which are opposed to the godly, submissive desires of the Spirit. Those ungodly heart idols do evil things like those listed here. Those who continue to do those things *have never received the Spirit and therefore cannot receive the kingdom*. The Spirit produces fruit like these inward virtues. The presence of the Spirit in the life of believer *guarantees* our increasing godliness. Why? Because there is no legislation that prevents it. And the rebellious impulses of the flesh have been put to death.

These are *realities*. These are truths to be believed. Because we have the life of the Spirit in us, we believe these truths and we bow to God in His precepts and providences. This is because all those in the New Covenant, all those in Christ, all those who are true believers, have received the Word and the Spirit in their inner man.

If you have a part of this gathered body for a long time, you have heard these truths regularly from this pulpit, in our Bible Education, in counseling training, in counseling, in discipleship. These are not new to you. But I want you to understand that the Bible connects these to the New Covenant and to the realities Christ has brought about.

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## **Reflect and Respond**

- Truth transforms through faith
- Life transforms through the Spirit
- May faith be working through love in us.

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