



## LIVING BEYOND THE RULES

Roughly 2,600 years ago, the nation of Judah was in disarray, facing inevitable judgment from God because they had consistently refused to honour their covenant with him. In the midst of this looming disaster, the prophet Jeremiah had a vision. This Jeremiah was the one who had been predicting the coming disaster for over 20 years. Now, this same Jeremiah had a vision of hope, of mercy after judgment:

*"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Jacob ... This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts ... No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother saying, "Know the LORD", because they will all know me, from the greatest to the least," declares the LORD." (Jer. 31:31, 33 – 34).*

What a vision of hope – a new covenant to replace the one that was rendered powerless by human frailty and sin!

600 years later, a man called Jesus sat in an upper room with his disciples, and made the following bold assertion as he shared a Passover meal with them:

*"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Lk. 22:20).*

The truth is that the New Testament teaches that we are living in the days of Jeremiah's "new covenant" – days when believers no longer need an external law to tell them what God requires, because the requirements of God are written instead upon their hearts, by the Holy Spirit. The reality, however, is that many believers (for one reason or other) live with a rule-based faith, rather than the Spirit-led life of the new covenant.

In this series of studies, we will look at what it means to live "beyond the rules" in the new covenant instituted through the death of Christ. Not living *without* the rules (as if we were free from any control upon our lives), but *beyond* the rules, in a place where faith and love compel so much more than what mere rules could demand.

Our topics are:

- The fact that we have been saved by grace, through faith;
- The fact that we have died to the law through the body of Christ; and
- How we are now free to bear fruit to God through the life of the Spirit.

May God bless and challenge you as you study this vitally important subject!

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>LIVING BEYOND THE RULES .....</b>	<b>I</b>
STUDY 1: "BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH" .....	1-1
1. <i>Salvation by grace</i> .....	1-1
1.1. What is "salvation"? .....	1-2
1.2. What is "grace"? .....	1-2
1.3. What is "faith"?.....	1-3
2. <i>Two common errors</i> .....	1-4
2.1. Salvation by works – legalism .....	1-5
2.2. Sanctification by works – nomism.....	1-5
2.3. What are the symptoms of these errors? .....	1-6
3. <i>What must we do?</i> .....	1-7
Thought for the week:.....	1-7
STUDY 2: WE DIED TO THE LAW.....	2-1
1. <i>What the death of Christ has achieved</i> .....	2-1
1.1. The issue of authority.....	2-1
2. <i>Why did we need to die to the law?</i> .....	2-3
2.1. Belonging to Jesus .....	2-3
2.2. The sin problem .....	2-3
2.3. Direct relationship with God.....	2-4
3. <i>What must we do?</i> .....	2-5
Thought for the week:.....	2-5
STUDY 3: BEARING FRUIT TO GOD.....	3-1
1. <i>The way of the Spirit – how the new covenant works</i> .....	3-1
1.1. The order in which things operate .....	3-1
1.2. Holiness is a person, not a set of rules .....	3-2
2. <i>How do we live by the Spirit?</i> .....	3-2
2.1. Make sure you have received the Spirit.....	3-3
2.2. Worship in the Spirit.....	3-4
2.3. Understand that you have died to the law .....	3-4
2.4. Let God renew your mind.....	3-5
2.5. Walk by faith, not by sight.....	3-5
2.6. Wait upon God.....	3-6
2.7. Do what God says!.....	3-6
3. <i>Conclusion: Our only obligation</i> .....	3-7
Concluding thought:.....	3-7



## STUDY 1: "BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH"

The New Testament preaches a gospel of "salvation". But what is this "salvation", and how does it operate? What must we do in order to be "saved"?

### 1. SALVATION BY GRACE

The Apostle Paul summarised the New Testament message of salvation to the church in Ephesus as follows:

*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph. 2: 8 – 9)*

This statement covers three essential truths:

1. Salvation is by grace – that is, God's unmerited favour. There is nothing you and I can ever do to deserve salvation;
2. Salvation is through faith – that is, the grace of God is mediated to us as we believe the good news of the gospel; and
3. Salvation is not dependent on what we do – so none of us can boast about what we have done (or judge others for what they have not done).

This statement appears clear cut, however we need to go into a little more detail as to what it means. It is easy to think we believe Paul's bold statement, and yet to significantly fall short in our understanding of its true importance. We will usually misunderstand Paul by underestimating what Paul means by "salvation", "grace", and "faith".



### 1.1. What is "salvation"?

In the verses quoted, what does Paul mean by "salvation"? In the New Testament, salvation can mean three things:

1. It can refer to the completed work of Christ on the cross, and our appropriation of it to become believers. In this sense, believers can state, "We have been saved" (i.e. past tense);
2. It can refer to the ongoing work of sanctification whereby believers are changed "from one degree of glory to another" until the Lord returns. In this sense, believers can state, "We are being saved" (i.e. present tense); and
3. It can refer to the final work of glorification whereby believers are translated into the presence of the Lord, to be made forever like him and to live in his presence forever. In this sense, believers can state, "We will be saved" (i.e. future tense).

When Paul asserts that salvation is "by grace through faith", in which sense is he using the word "salvation" – the past, present, or future tense? Many Christians believe that the completed work of salvation and the future promise of salvation are secured by faith, but act as if the present work of sanctification is dependent upon their own efforts. However, it is clear from Paul's writings that he believed that *the whole process of salvation* (past, present, and future tenses) was totally a work of grace, through faith.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul made this very clear:

*"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes ... For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last ..."* (Rom. 1:16 – 17)

### 1.2. What is "grace"?

What does Paul mean by "grace"? When we first become believers, many of us are taught that it is "God's unmerited favour" – and this is certainly true. However, "grace" also has the connotation of "power" – it comes from the same Greek word used to describe the gifts of supernatural power at work in the New Testament church.

For example, consider the following verses from 2 Corinthians:



*"And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches ... For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability ..."* (2 Cor. 8:1 – 2)

and also the following:

*"But he [the ascended Lord Jesus] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"* (2 Cor. 12:8 – 9)

In both these passages, it makes little sense to interpret the word "grace" solely in terms of "unmerited favour" – there needs to be a sense of enabling power poured out upon the recipient of the grace for each passage to make sense.

Putting these two senses together, we need to understand that grace is *the supernatural power of God, poured out into the lives of those who need it but don't deserve it, to transform sinners into saints*. According to Paul, this power is at work in everyone who believes (Eph. 1:19 ff) – no exception!

The New Testament provides us with numerous examples of this power of grace – for example, Peter (Lk. 22:54 – 62, cf Ac. 4:8 – 12) and Paul himself (1 Tim. 1:15 – 17).

It is only when we understand the power of grace to transform lives that we will begin to believe that our ongoing sanctification (as well as our eternal destiny) is mediated by grace through faith, rather than depending upon our own efforts.

### **1.3. What is "faith"?**

Finally, what does the Apostle Paul mean by "faith"? Some people struggle with the apparent contradiction between Paul and James (see Jas. 2:14 – 26), but the problem is more one of language rather than substance.

Paul was a very religious man (a Pharisee) before he came to know Christ, and was absolutely committed to a life of obedience to the known will of God. This did not change when he met Christ – he was still committed to obedience (see Ac. 24:16). However, what did change was his understanding of how obedience comes about:

- Paul the Pharisee believed in obedience to the law – that is, that God revealed his will through various rules, and that it was up to Paul to keep those rules; however,
- Paul the Christian believed in the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5) – that is, when he believed in Jesus from the heart, then the grace of God so overflowed in his heart that he was compelled by the love of God to live the way God required.



The “old” Paul lived by his own works; the “new” Paul by the power of God. This “faith” that Paul preached, then, was no idle intellectual assent to certain doctrines – *it was a total commitment from the heart to the truth of a message that had already transformed his life, and was continuing to transform him as he continued to trust in it.*

Paul summarised his “philosophy” of the true meaning of faith in these words to the church in Corinth:

*“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” (2 Cor. 5:14)*

Note in particular the link between what Paul believed (“we are convinced that ...”), the intensity of that faith (“we are convinced ...”), and the result of believing (“Christ’s love compels us ...”).

It is this sort of faith – from the heart, convincing us of the truth of the gospel and compelling us by love to be imitators of Christ – that releases the power of God to save us.

## **2. TWO COMMON ERRORS**

Paul’s statement in Ephesians 2:8 – 9 can therefore be paraphrased something like the following:

*“The whole process of salvation – from the day you first came to believe in Jesus, right through the lifelong journey of sanctification, and culminating in that glorious day when Jesus will return and the job will be finished – that whole process is the unmerited favour of God, a free gift of life-transforming power that works in you by faith. All you need to do is to let your heart be captivated by the wonderful love and power of God. None of it depends upon anything you do – so you can’t boast about how good you are, or judge others for being less well advanced upon the road than you appear to be. It is by grace that you are saved, through faith!”*

However, there are two alternative views about salvation that are directly opposed to Paul’s teaching, and these are both common in the Church today.



## **2.1. Salvation by works – legalism**

The first erroneous view we need to face is called legalism – that is, the view that your salvation (from beginning to end) depends upon how good you are (usually measured against keeping a set of rules and regulations – hence the term “legalism”).

Legalism was the predominant view in practice throughout the middle ages, and is still the dominant view among those who call themselves Christians (especially in Europe, America, and the countries like Australia that have been influenced by their culture).

Legalism was Paul’s doctrine of life before he met Jesus:

*“If anyone else thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more ... as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” (Phil. 3:6)*

## **2.2. Sanctification by works – nomism**

Just as dangerous as legalism is a teaching that is far more prominent among believing Christians, and far more subtle – the view that is known as nomism. Nomism accepts that salvation (in its past tense) is by grace through faith, but believes that the ongoing work of salvation is “up to us” – in other words, it depends upon human achievement rather than divine grace.

For the nomist, this inevitably means that the Christian life is a matter of “keeping the rules” (whether those rules be the teaching of the Church, doing what the Bible says, or any other set of rules that are seen to reflect God’s requirements).

Most people who become nomists do not do so consciously – it is more a case that:

1. They are never taught about what salvation means;
2. They have never experienced grace as “power”, therefore their understanding of it is limited to the theological meaning of “unmerited favour”; and
3. They have never (or rarely) experienced faith as a life-transforming experience.

Consequently, there is a vacuum in their lives about the process of sanctification – and they fill this void with rules and regulations.



### **2.3. What are the symptoms of these errors?**

If legalism and nomism are common errors, how can we know if we have fallen into their clutches? Here are some of the tell-tale symptoms?

Symptoms of legalism:

1. Do you believe you are “not good enough” to be a Christian? (or worse, that you *are* good enough!)
2. Do you understand the statement “he isn’t really a Christian” as a criticism of that person’s character more than a statement of his or her beliefs?
3. Do you find yourself judging other people who claim to be Christians, measuring them against some standard you have in mind of what Christians are supposed to be like?
4. Is your life dominated by pride?

Symptoms of nomism:

1. Do you believe you are “not good enough” or “not committed enough” to receive healing, or the gift of the Spirit, or any other blessing that others experience?
2. Are you plagued by feelings of guilt about your level of spiritual maturity? Do you feel guilty about not praying enough, or not reading the Bible enough?
3. Is your life dominated by “oughts” (i.e. “I really ought to do this”, or “I ought to think / believe that”)?
4. Is faith to you something you have to do? Do you therefore feel guilty if you don’t have enough faith? Do you ever say to people, “The reason you didn’t get healed is because you didn’t have enough faith?”
5. Are you conscious of striving in your Christian walk – and therefore of constant negativity about yourself and a sense of failure?
6. Are you a “minimalist” Christian – i.e. someone who is always asking, “do I *have to* do that in order to be a Christian”?





7. Do you believe there is a distinction between “good Christians” and “bad Christians”?
8. Do you find yourself subconsciously judging fellow believers because they do or don't behave in certain ways (e.g. “He calls himself a Christian, but he smokes!”)
9. Is pride a constant temptation to you?

### **3. WHAT MUST WE DO?**

All these attitudes / statements (none of which can be sustained by the New Testament) are symptoms of a wrong understanding of the gospel – a wrong understanding caused by the mistaken belief that, as Christians, we are obliged (in some way) to live under the authority of various rules and laws.

Paul calls this “the offence of the gospel” – it offends our pride to realise that we are powerless to make ourselves one smallest bit “better” in the eyes of God.

In order to go forwards, we need to understand the gospel better – this will be covered in the rest of these studies. But more importantly, we need to be open to change, to be willing to let God transform us by grace. Paul has a word of warning for us all, a warning based upon his interpretation of the rejection of Christ by the Jews of his day:

*“What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it ... They stumbled over the ‘stumbling stone’ ... For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” (Rom. 9:30 – 32, 10:1 – 4)*

Ultimately, it is up to us whether we are prepared to repent (and submit to God’s righteousness) or to continue to stumble over the “stumbling stone”.

#### ***Thought for the week:***

*I am saved by grace – therefore I am no worse than anyone else, but also no better.*



## STUDY 2: WE DIED TO THE LAW

If the Christian life does not depend upon our own efforts or abilities, but by grace working through faith, what should our attitude be towards rules and laws? What should our attitude be towards the law of God? What should our attitude be towards the Bible itself?

### 1. WHAT THE DEATH OF CHRIST HAS ACHIEVED

The death of Christ has far-reaching implications for life under the new covenant – far more significant than many Christians realise. It even affects the way we are to respond to God's law:

*"Do you not know, brothers – for I am speaking to men who know the law – that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? ... You also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God." (Rom. 7:1, 4)*

According to Paul, we need to understand that we are now dead to the law, even to the law of God – as a direct result of what Christ achieved on the cross. What does this mean?

#### 1.1. *The issue of authority*

When we live under rules or laws, those rules have "authority" over us – in a sense, they "own" us, and we "belong" to them (see the language used by Paul in v1 and v4). They control us by telling us how we ought to live, and (as a corollary) we feel guilty if we don't submit to their authority.

Under the old covenant, God's spiritual authority over his people was delegated to the law and the sacrificial system – provided you made the appropriate sacrifices and submitted to God's law, you lived under God's blessing. But all this has changed under the new covenant.

Under the new covenant, *there is no such thing as delegated authority*. That is, *the only ultimate authority* we should recognise is:



- The will of the Father;
- Expressed in the life of his Son Jesus; and
- Mediated to us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

If any person or thing (including the Bible itself!) is to be allowed to have influence over our spiritual lives, then it must be within the boundaries of this fundamental precept – that is, we must only allow that person or thing to have influence because that God’s Spirit is using that person or thing as an instrument. Thus,

- Wives are exhorted to submit to their husbands – but only “as to the Lord” (Col. 3:18);
- Likewise, the submission of slaves to masters and children to parents “as to the Lord” is counselled (Col. 3:20, 22), as is the submission to secular authorities (Rom. 13:1 – 7; 1 Pet. 2:13);
- Indeed, we are all exhorted to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ (Eph. 5:21).

When many of the Nazi leaders were put on trial after the Second World War for their crimes against humanity, they pleaded that “they were only following orders”. At times, well-meaning Christians have acted as if this is what the Bible means by “submission to authority”. However, as the above examples illustrate, this sort of submission is *never an option* for the Spirit-led believer.

In the New Testament, submission is not a slavish, unthinking obedience that is required (i.e. one that delegates ultimate responsibility to the other party), but ***a step of faith taken with the belief that, because God has established certain authority structures in society and given different gifts / responsibilities to different people, therefore God will meet us personally by his Spirit as we work within those established structures.***

Ultimately, there is only one authority over the believer, and that is Christ himself – and life under the new covenant demands that we only submit to the authority of Christ himself.



## 2. WHY DID WE NEED TO DIE TO THE LAW?

According to Paul in the text we quoted above, the reason why we needed to die to the law was that we might belong to another (Jesus), and bear fruit to God. What does this mean?

### 2.1. *Belonging to Jesus*

To believe in Jesus means to belong to him – to have the ownership of your life transferred from your own hands into the hands of him who is Lord of all:

*“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” (2 Cor. 5:15).*

We might be excused for believing that submission to godly laws (e.g. the Bible, for example) was consistent with the idea of belonging to Jesus – but this was not Paul’s view. To him, submitting to the authority of rules (even God’s rules) was not an option for the believer – you can either belong to the rules, or belong to Jesus, but you can’t have both.

### 2.2. *The sin problem*

The reason why submission to God’s rules is inconsistent with belonging to Jesus is found when we start to grapple with the fundamental nature of the sort of people we are – what you might call “the sin problem”. Many people seem to think that we are all basically good people who occasionally make mistakes, and who therefore need correction – hence the benefit of “good laws”. However, Paul has a far more realistic view of human nature:

*“If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.” (Gal. 3:21 – 22)*

Put another way, sin is not a matter of simple ignorance – the sort of thing that good laws can fix up – but a matter of *deep, inbuilt hostility to God that is only exposed more starkly when God’s requirements are made more obvious to us.*



Thus, the law is powerless to help us, because we have no inherent power to obey – the more God reveals his law to us, the more we see that we are powerless to keep his law. (This is why the life lived under rules and laws is inevitably characterised by negativity, defeat, and guilt).

At first glance, spiritual “rules” seem beneficial, and, in New Testament times (as today), some Christians submitted to them. However, Paul knew better:

*“Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? ... Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom ... but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” (Col. 2:20 – 21, 23 – 24)*

### **2.3. Direct relationship with God**

Many Christians believe that, when Paul talked about “the law”, he was referring to the Old Testament ceremonial law only, and that the reason why we died to the law is because those laws no longer apply to us (i.e. the law is now obsolete). Often, this teaching goes on to assume that the bits of the law that are still “relevant” to us (e.g. the Ten Commandments) still have authority over us.

However, Paul clearly did not teach that “the law” (or any part of it) was “obsolete”:

*“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.” (Rom. 7:12)*

Moreover, when we look closely at Paul’s teaching (and, in particular, at his reasons *why* we needed to die to the law) it is apparent that the problem is not the rules themselves, but us the sinners:

*“Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ... We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” (Rom. 7:9 – 10, 14).*

In other words, ***there is no law that could possibly be formulated (not even by God!) that would enable us to walk victoriously over sin.*** And so, it is the way of law that needs to be dispensed with, not one particular set of rules – we need to dispense with an *indirect* relationship with God (one mediated through rules) in favour of a *direct* relationship with God (through Christ, in the power of the Spirit).



Consider the following example: suppose you are sick and you need healing; you therefore ask a fellow believer for prayer. This fellow believer discerns that your faith is low – that you don't actually have faith that God will heal you.

- If that believer says to you: “You don't have enough faith – you need to believe, and then God will heal you!” – even if that person is speaking the truth in God, such a statement is law-based, and is powerless to make you believe. The result is that you will leave that place in a worse state than you arrived – defeated and guilty as well as sick – because you looked for God, but found only a law;
- If on the other hand that believer says to you: “Let's seek God – let's pray together and turn our eyes upon the Lord Jesus and the power of his Spirit” – then this is the way of grace. A direct relationship with God is being pursued, and the Spirit of God is free to work in that situation to produce the faith that is lacking, to produce light out of darkness. This is powerful – the grace of God at work.

### **3. WHAT MUST WE DO?**

The New Testament way is to live by the Spirit – the free gift that is available to all who call upon the name of Jesus. However, that gift will only operate in our lives if we are prepared to forsake our trust in the authority of rules and laws.

#### ***Thought for the week:***

*“Through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.” (Gal. 2:19)*



## STUDY 3: BEARING FRUIT TO GOD

In the previous study, we saw that the reason why we died to the law was so that we might “bear fruit to God” (Rom. 7:4). In this study, we will explore this theme in more detail, and explain how we can fulfil all of God’s righteous requirements by living in the power of his Holy Spirit.

### 1. THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT – HOW THE NEW COVENANT WORKS

The new covenant instituted through the death of Jesus is a covenant of grace – the power of God released into the lives of believers, to enable them to become everything that they could not hope to be in their own strength. It does not depend upon works (what we can achieve by striving), but it does produce fruit.

Paul summarised this teaching in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to the Galatians:

*“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature ... The acts of the sinful nature are obvious ... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Gal. 5:16, 19, 22 – 23)*

#### 1.1. The order in which things operate

The first thing to note is the order in which things operate, according to Paul – if you live by the Spirit, then the fruit of the Spirit will grow in your life. This is exactly the opposite to the way in which the old law-based covenant worked (if you produce certain works, then God will bless your life).

In other words, the goal of the Christian ought to be to live by the Spirit – not to try and produce certain fruit. The promise of God is that the fruit will grow if we live by the Spirit.

This is consistent with the teaching of Jesus:

*“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (Jn 15:5)*

We can only understand the way of the new covenant if we understand this principle: a life under God’s blessing leads to fruit; generating fruit does not lead to blessing.



## 1.2. ***Holiness is a person, not a set of rules***

All of this leads to something that should be self-evident, but is often overlooked: holiness to God is not defined by a set of rules, but rather a person – the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you want to be a truly holy person? Then you need to be like Jesus – and that is not a matter of keeping a set of rules.

After describing the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:23, Paul adds a very important phrase: “Against such things there is no law.” Can you imagine a legal system that outlawed love, joy, or peace? On the other hand, can you imagine one that demanded it: “If you do not feel at peace, you will go to gaol.”? Of course not! This is because what the Spirit produces in your life goes far beyond what any legal system could ever hope to achieve – it moulds you the sinner into the image of Jesus, the Son of God!

Jesus taught this as well:

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in spirit and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Mt. 11:28 – 30)*

In Jesus’ day, a Jewish man indicated his desire to lead a religious life by “taking the yoke of the law” upon himself. Jesus deliberately used this language to make his point, that his yoke was easy, because *the burden was not carried by you, but by God*. The only thing you have to do is to let God lead you step by step! The “yoke of the law” moulds you into a law-shaped person, but the “yoke of Jesus” moulds you into the shape of Jesus, and this is the way of holiness, the way of the Spirit.

## 2. **HOW DO WE LIVE BY THE SPIRIT?**

If the new covenant is all about living in the power of the Spirit, how do we go about living in this way? It is not possible to cover all of the issues in a study of this size, but here is a broad outline of the steps you will need to take.





## **2.1. Make sure you have received the Spirit**

Firstly, you need to ensure that you have received the Spirit, if you are to live by the Spirit. This is a somewhat controversial topic, since most church traditions teach that you receive the Spirit automatically, either when you are baptised (Catholic / High Church position), or when you first believe (Evangelical position).

The reality is that neither of these reflect the Biblical data, where the word for “receive” implies an active rather than a passive state of mind – it doesn’t happen automatically, but you have to take steps to make it happen. This is confirmed by the evidence in the book of Acts, where there are two situations described (Ac. 8:14 – 17 and Ac. 19:1 – 7) where people had met the conditions necessary for salvation (repentance, faith, and baptism) but had not yet received the Holy Spirit – and special steps were taken by the apostles to remedy the situation.

The words of Jesus also confirm that you have an active role to play in receiving the Holy Spirit:

*“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you ... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk. 11:9, 13)*

In context, Jesus is talking about an “asking” which is persistent, repetitive, pleading – not something you just ask once and then assume “by faith” that you have received it! If Jesus taught that you need to seek the gift of the Holy Spirit in this manner, then how could it be that the gift is received automatically when we are baptised, or when we believe?

To understand what it means to receive the gift of the Spirit, you need to spend a lot of time studying the experience of the early church in the book of Acts. For our current purposes, it is sufficient to note that a desire to live by the Spirit will only be fulfilled in your life if you first ensure that you have received the gift of the Father (as was the case for Jesus – see Mt. 3:16 cf 4:1).



## **2.2. Worship in the Spirit**

Having received the Spirit, the next most significant key to living in the Spirit is worshipping in the Spirit.

To worship God means to give him all the honour and glory that is due to him. Many people seek to worship God, but only under their own terms – using words that they understand, songs that they like, methods of expression that they feel comfortable with. But worship is about God, not us – true worship must be in the manner he loves, not the manner we like. As Jesus said, true worship is in Spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24).

If you want to know the type of worship that God desires, read the book of Psalms! Spiritual worship is expressive – hands, feet, heart, and voice were all designed for use in worship! Music is also an important (Eph. 5:18 – 20). We need to be like King David, who danced before the Lord “with all his might” (2 Sam. 6:14), rather than his wife Michal who was more concerned with what other people thought (2 Sam. 6:20).

And another important thing – the state of your worship life is a pretty good indicator of whether or not you are in bondage to rules. Where the law has authority, human effort is important, and the heart of worship dries up; but where grace abounds, worship overflows. So learn to worship God in Spirit and in truth!

## **2.3. Understand that you have died to the law**

The next step is to take the time to understand from the Scriptures the reality of what Christ has done for you – that you have truly died to the law, so that you can live for God. The basis of this teaching is found mainly in the books of Romans (chapters 5 to 8) and Galatians.

According to Paul, you cannot live by the law as well as living by the Spirit – the two are mutually exclusive. Consequently, even if you have had a dynamic experience of receiving the power of the Spirit, that anointing will be quickly dissipated if you attempt to let rules and laws direct your life.

We all need to remember the words of Paul in this regard:

*“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free [from the law]. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Gal. 5:1)*



## **2.4. Let God renew your mind**

The key to a consistent life of being led by the Spirit is to have a renewed mind. A renewed mind is one that listens to, and submits to, the voice of the Spirit (rather than deciding for itself what is right and wrong – this is described by Paul as “the mind of the flesh”).

Paul demonstrates the importance of your mind by dealing with it as soon as he starts to describe the life of the Spirit in Romans 8:

*“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.” (Rom. 8:5 – 8)*

The life of the Spirit can be likened to sailing across a lake (as opposed to rowing across, which is the life of the flesh). Both modes of transport require effort – in the case of the sailing boat, the effort is provided by the wind (God’s Spirit). Both also require human action – in the case of the sailing boat, the sailor is required to “set his sails”. This is the all-important role of the mind in the life of the Spirit – you need to set your mind in such a way that your life is open to the “wind of the Spirit”, no matter which way it is blowing. If you do not set your sails right, you will go nowhere, no matter how hard the wind is blowing!

## **2.5. Walk by faith, not by sight**

The life of the Spirit is a life of faith, not sight (2 Cor. 5:7) – that is, God will tell you what to do, and sometimes what he is going to do, well before you see any evidence that this is true. The evidence will follow once you obey – if you wait for something to happen before stepping out in faith, you will never achieve anything!

This does not mean, of course, that you should act alone – you will need to take wise counsel from godly people in order to discern what the mind of the Spirit is. But, once you have found the will of God, you will need to act on it by faith, before seeing the thing God has promised you come to pass.



## **2.6. Wait upon God**

Waiting upon God is a skill that you need to develop in your life. It involves spending time in the presence of the Lord, not just expecting an instantaneous answer to your particular prayer need, but allowing God to work his will into your life, even in ways that are contrary to what you think are possible.

Waiting on God is not about telling God what your wishes or needs are, but *hearing his answers to meet your needs*.

Waiting on God involves prayerful study of God's word – you do not wait on God with an empty mind, but with one that is filled with his word. You will also need to learn to move in the gifts of the Spirit (especially prophecy – see Ac. 13:1 – 3, 1 Cor. 14:1 ff) so that your spiritual “ears” can be better attuned to God's voice. In some circumstances, fasting can also be an important tool in your armoury.

Paul described God as:

*“... him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us ...” (Eph. 3:20)*

You will only begin to grasp what this “immeasurably more” is as you spend time waiting on him – if you have a shallow prayer life, you can expect only to receive shallow answers!

## **2.7. Do what God says!**

Finally, the life of the Spirit is a life of obedience – but not the slavish obedience required by the law, but “the obedience of faith.” Are you excited to be filled with the awesome presence of the Spirit of God? It gets better and better the more you yield to his leading! Are you amazed to be a brother in equal standing with Jesus, the only begotten Son of God? Then honour his name by submitting to his authority! Are you overjoyed at the great love the Father has lavished on you, that you should be called a child of God? Then do his will, and let him change you from one degree of glory to another!

God will only lead where you are willing to follow. If you want to live by the Spirit, then you must be led by the Spirit – according to Paul, this is the true mark of the new covenant believer:

*“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (Rom. 8:15)*



### 3. CONCLUSION: OUR ONLY OBLIGATION

To finish up this important topic, then we need to understand that living “beyond the rules” involves setting us free from the burdensome requirement to live under rules and laws (no matter how good or even godly those rules are), and submitting to the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2).

Men and women who live under the law are under an obligation to try to obey the law – an obligation that they will surely fail to fulfil. But those who live according to the Spirit acknowledge a different obligation – an obligation that leads to freedom:

*“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ... Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Rom. 8:12 – 14, 17)*

We need to understand that our only obligation is to the Spirit of God. (This will, of course, require us to submit to the word of God, and to God’s properly instituted authorities, but only because this is the way the Spirit of God chooses to operate). If you are a believer in Jesus, then *there is no other obligation upon your life whatsoever* apart from your obligation to the Spirit of God. Simple, isn’t it?

#### **Concluding thought:**

*“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:17 – 18).*

*This is my destiny, as I commit myself to living under obligation to the Holy Spirit, rather than to rules and laws.*