

Midnight Cry Messenger

FREELY SHARED WITH THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY FOR TRUTH — NOT TO BE SOLD

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Commands and Promises

by Phil Enlow

The New Testament, beginning with the record of the earthly life of our Lord Jesus as recorded in the gospels, sets forth the glorious new covenant that defines our relationship with God. We learn of the amazing sacrifice of our Lord that provides a basis for the forgiveness of sins and opens up a door of reconciliation between a sinful people and a holy God. We learn of the wonderful promise of eternal life, a gift of God's grace, a life that begins with a new birth by God's Spirit and continues throughout the ages of eternity. Together with the truths that form the foundation of this new covenant we also find many other writings that seem to fall into the categories of either "commands" or "promises."

Christians love the promises — and well they should! Who has not received comfort in times of difficulty from the precious promises of God? Phil. 4:13 — "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Phil. 4:19 — "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Heb. 13:5 — "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Phil. 1:6 — "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." 1 Cor. 10:13 — "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

These and many other wonderful promises have given the followers of Jesus much comfort and strength down through the years. Truly they are "very great and precious promises" as we read in 2 Peter 1:4.

Commands

But there are also many "commands." John 13:34-35 — "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Matt. 5:48 — "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Col. 3:18-20 — "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." Rom. 12:14 — "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Matt. 5:44 — "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...."

In fact, the New Testament is filled with commands, that is, instructions in godliness that touch on every area of human life. Everyone has

heard of the "ten commandments" of the Old Testament. But where do New Testaments "commands" fit into the picture? What *is* the basic nature of our relationship with God?

Legalism

For some reason it seems that the natural human mind tends to take a very legalistic view of the Bible and living for God. The relationship between God and man is seen as that of Lawgiver and subject. As the Lawgiver He makes rules that define right and wrong and it is up to us to obey the rules. Those who obey the rules are accepted and rewarded and those who disobey are judged and punished.

I have met many people who obviously viewed Christian living through such legalistic eyes. They would on one hand acknowledge God's promises of salvation and forgiveness of sins yet in practice their relationship with God was defined by a long list of "do's and don'ts." And they would be quick to let you know what those do's and don'ts were!

Every command they encountered in the scriptures would add to the list of "laws to obey." Often they would interpret these commands

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Who Are You?

By Phil Enlow

Adapted from a message preached at the Bible Tabernacle in August 2020.

It seems rather obvious that there is an increase in the power of darkness that the Lord has allowed to flood our earth. We are told to expect it, and the Lord is using it, and He's using it to prove who we are. He's using it to prove who He is. And I believe He's using it to bring about a separation in the human family.

What an amazing thing it is that "...he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight..." Eph. 1:4! What a God we have, Who knows us ahead of time, and doesn't choose us because we are worthy somehow and better than everyone else! He has a way of taking the worst of the worst and saying, "That one's mine. Look what I'm going to be able to do with that one. I'm going to take them out of the gutter. I'm going to clean them up, and they're going to be part of My Kingdom for My glory."

We have no reason to live for anything else. And this is an hour when I believe God is calling His children to grow up, to learn to know Him in a deeper way.

But for many, the question needs to be asked, how do we become an heir of all these things? When we talk about who we are in Christ and being chosen and loved as God's children, how do we get to that place? Who is that talking about? Is that talking about you, for example? That's something to think about, isn't it?

Obviously, we have all been born into the human family. That's how we became human. Let's imagine for a moment that your family name is Smith. How did you become a Smith? Did you adopt a code of ethics, a code of conduct, learn what the family beliefs were and earn that place?

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Editor's Letter

Dear Saints,

Greetings once again in the wonderful name of our Lord Jesus! Another hot summer finds us rejoicing in the Lord's goodness as we continue to look to Him to lead us like the good Shepherd He is through this crazy world.

We continue to see the things the Lord has made real to us unfold on planet earth. Satan is loose — for the final time — and the evidence of that is everywhere. In every area of human life on planet earth Satan and his kingdom are at work tearing at the fabric of life as we have known it, seeking to bring all under his control. The cry of many influential people is for a "new world order" with man at the center that will somehow ensure that the human race will continue. We know how that story will end!

We rejoice that we have been able to meet together during most of the pandemic. Of course we have tried to be conscious of the need to be cautious and wise. Some have, for various reasons, remained at home but Zoom has enabled not only them, but others more distant, to tune in to the Sunday service.

We also were able to have our June convention in Southern Pines this year and many were able to attend in person. The Lord richly blessed with His presence and much-needed encouragement.

A major theme from the convention was "simplicity." When you break everything down the greatest need is not some new exotic revelation of "hidden" truth but rather walking in the simplicity of the gospel. Even a child can do that! We are the ones who complicate things.

Please remember an upcoming youth camp early in August. It is a limited event primarily due to space limitations in the campground that was available but we are expecting the Lord to do wonderful things in the lives of precious young people.

The lead article this time is a reprint of, "Commands and Promises." How wonderful it is that the ability to live as God's people comes from God's faithful provision and not from human resources. If God has our hearts then He supplies the rest!

The other article is adapted from a preached message and focuses on the need

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with a very carnal understanding of God's intent. Certain commands would be emphasized out of all proportion to the scriptures and strongly imposed on all who could be persuaded — usually through fear. Often such people are quick to condemn those who don't live according to their standards. Their world is divided into those who "keep the commandments" and those who don't — as they see it of course.

Often such people's religion is defined much more by their "don'ts" than by their "do's." To those looking on they are the people who dress funny and don't do this, and don't do that, etc. Each group seems to have its own particular standards as to what they "don't" do in their attempts to live as they believe God wants them to. They don't dress in whatever manner they have defined as "worldly." They don't engage in this activity, or that one. Some won't drink coffee or tea. Some don't observe Christmas (a Babylonian feast). Some insist on Sabbath observance and consign everyone who worships on Sunday to hell.

Bro. Thomas and some others once visited a church where a visiting evangelist preached a very legalistic message. He told all the ladies with short hair that they had better pray that the rapture wouldn't come until their hair had grown out or they would be left behind! He also warned strongly against any sort of jewelry. Bro. Thomas noticed that the man's tie didn't seem to be flopping around and it came out that he had discreetly pinned his tie into place from behind. That way he could control it without using — heaven forbid! — a tie tack, a piece of *jewelry*!

Man-made Rules

Many such beliefs should be easily recognizable as silly extremes, a modern equivalent of Phariseism where men make up rules by

of real salvation. People are making choices every day, choices that have eternal implications. We are still here for a reason, to let the light of true salvation shine. The world grows darker and so much religion is in a state of apostasy but the Lord's sovereign plan is unfolding and He will never lose even one He has foreknown. However things may look as we move forward, God remains on the throne and there is nothing the devil can do about it!

Continue to pray for us that we will be enabled to faithfully fulfill our place in God's plan. We pray for you. Particularly remember our brothers and sisters in many difficult places in the world. Our prayers make a difference. It won't be long!

Till next time may God's rich blessings be yours.

Your brother in Christ,
Phil Enlow

looking at God's Word with natural understanding and legalistic eyes. In so doing they miss completely what God intended and bring people into great bondage. Matthew 15:3-9, Matthew 23.

Man-made rules are just one result of one's religion being based on law-keeping. But even where people do not go to great extremes many miss God's intent in the New Covenant by reading the Word with legalistic glasses on. Where we see "grace" they see "law." Of course, there are many scriptures that seem to lend credence to legalism — as long as you view them through legalistic glasses!

John 15:10-11 — "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." John 15:14-15 — "You are my friends if you do what I command." 1 Cor. 7:19 — "Keeping God's commands is what counts." 1 John 2:3-4 — "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands." 1 John 5:3 — "This is love for God: to obey his commands."

That certainly sounds like a commandment-based religion! Yet Paul tells us that we are "not under law, but under grace." Rom. 6:14. How can that be? How does it all fit together? What kind of a relationship *do* we have under the new covenant? Is it just an updated version of Old Testament law or something different?

The Law of Moses

Let's briefly explore the covenant that God established with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. Along with the more general "ten commandments" there were laws regulating virtually every facet of life. These laws were meant to restrain evil among a people who were, except for a small minority, basically heathen. 1 Timothy 1:9. Gal. 3:19. The laws were also given to teach the people about God's holiness and to show them that they were sinners. Rom. 3:19. Of course, God knew that no one could possibly keep His laws perfectly so He graciously instituted a sacrificial system designed to deal with sin and guilt. This system foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ yet to come through whom the actual forgiveness came. The blood of animals had no power in itself but represented what was to come. Heb. 9:11-15, 10:1-4.

The law was a "black and white" world of extremes. Those who lived under it were either blessed or cursed depending upon their observance of the law. There was no middle ground. Read Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 to see these extremes. Here are a couple of excerpts from chapter 28:

Deut. 28:1-6 — "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon

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you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

Then read Deut. 28:15-19 — “However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.”

As Deut. 27:26 says, “Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.” Paul refers to this verse in Gal. 3:10 where he says, “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse.” James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” Basically if a man is trying to win acceptance with God through keeping His laws he had better do it perfectly — all the time! One single failure and he is guilty!

Promise of a New Covenant

Jer. 31:31-34 records a wonderful promise of what was to come: “The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “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. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Note that the new covenant was **not to be like** the first one. It was to be something very different. The new covenant centered around faith in Christ. In Gal. 3:23-25 Paul said, “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

Two Ways to Serve God

In Rom. 7:6 Paul speaks of two different ways to serve God: “...we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” That alone should be enough to tell us that the commandments of the New Testament are not just a new version of Old Testament laws. We serve God, just by a very different set of principles.

As I read Romans 7 I am convinced that Paul learned this the hard way. His whole religious upbringing was legalistic. He saw life and his relationship with God in terms of the law of Moses. Of course the Pharisees, the sect Paul had belonged to, had over the centuries made many uninspired and very convenient interpretations of the law. Their religion had been reduced to a lot of clear rules about external behavior while they totally neglected the things that really mattered to God, things relating to the heart. That is why Jesus compared them to “whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean.” Matt. 23:27.

It is very interesting that in describing his life as a Pharisee Paul uses these words: “as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” Phil. 3:6. We see mirrored in him what Jesus was talking about. Paul had thought himself a perfectly righteous man in God’s eyes, yet he was clueless when it came to the heart. But now in Romans 7 we see a very different man. It is evident that what he is describing here occurred after he met Christ and became a believer. His conscience had become awakened to inward sinfulness.

We can almost see his legalistic mind at work. He is very aware that “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.” Verse 12. And so he sets forth with all his might to obey that law. But something is terribly wrong! Rom. 7:15-20 says, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”

The key is in verse 18: “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” This is a question not of desire but of **ability**. Paul wanted to do the right thing yet found himself unable — *even as a believer*. It was in the anguish of this experience that he learned just how ineffective the law was in establishing a relationship with God and why salvation was necessary. He came face to face with the prin-

ciple of sin within himself that made all forms of self-effort and self-righteousness totally impossible. That is why he classed himself among those “who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.” Phil. 3:3.

This gets to the heart of the issue. Commandment-keeping is, by its very nature, dependent upon human ability. God gives commandments and it is up to us and our ability to keep them. But if our relationship with God is based on laws and commandments, and we do not have the ability to keep them, then our situation is a hopeless one indeed!

The way Paul describes human inability it should be evident that commandment-keeping in the legalistic sense cannot play **any** part in our salvation. Yet some try to mix law and grace as if we are saved by grace but kept by keeping commandments. If that is so then salvation does not depend upon Christ at all but upon *our ability*. The truth is that if any part of salvation depends upon our ability then it is not really salvation at all and we have no hope. That would be like a bridge that extended across a gorge to within 100 feet of the other side. At the end of the bridge is a sign that reads “This is as far as the bridge can take you. It’s up to you to make it from here.”

The Strange Effect of Law

Even where there is no law, the law of sin and death reigns over Adam’s children. Romans 5:12-14. But when law does come it has a curious effect: it actually strengthens sin’s power over us! Our nature is somewhat like a snake. You may happen upon a poisonous snake basking in the sun and looking very peaceful. But begin to harass the snake by poking it with a stick and see just how peaceful it is! Its nature will be aroused by the stick and it will begin to strike out against the threat.

As Paul said, “What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.” Rom. 7:7-8. He goes on to say, “...in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.” Verse 13. Rom. 5:20 tells us that “The law was added so that the trespass might increase.” The law does not merely **reveal** sin in us; it actually **provokes it!**

God knows we are sinners. He wants us to know it. We are not just ignorant and misdirected; without God we are hopelessly lost, bound with unbreakable chains, captive in sin’s dungeon with only death to look forward to. It is the mercy of God when He makes His laws known that we might realize our need of a Savior.

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Is There Hope?

At the end of Romans 7 Paul expresses the anguish of a man who has come to understand his need. He says, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Rom. 7:24. But is that the end of the story? Is our relationship with God to be defined by “keeping commandments”? Are we to be forever stuck on the merry-go-round of self-effort, failure, and condemnation?

Think about it. God knows our true condition. He knows that the very act of imposing laws upon us actually strengthens sin’s power over us. The more He tells us what to do the more sin rises up in rebellion. But what kind of covenant would it be that did not address this need? Thank God for the forgiveness of sin but has He consigned us to helpless frustration in our efforts to live for Him?

The New Way

Of course the answer is “No.” Paul had earlier spoken of the two ways of serving God. One was through the written code, the law, and the other was “the new way of the Spirit.” Rom. 7:6. This is what he introduces in chapter 8, and the principles involved infuse his writings everywhere. Paul had no tolerance for anyone who attempted to bring believers under law in any form. He understood better than anyone what terrible bondage that was, and how ineffective as well.

In Rom. 8:2 he says that “through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” The result of Christ’s work and God’s plan is “that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.” Verse 4. Under the new covenant we are born of God’s Spirit into His family and that new life within makes it possible for us to live for God. It is not our great and sincere efforts to keep God’s laws but “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Colossians 1:27. As Gal. 2:20 says, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” KJV. Not my faith — His!

Satan loves to cloud the issue in a number of ways. On the one hand he encourages legalism. The legalist sees the preacher of grace as not properly emphasizing “holiness,” thereby encouraging people to live careless lives that presume upon God’s grace. No doubt there are those who do just that but that is not biblical grace. Paul describes true grace in these words: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:11-14. The true grace of God is not just about forgiving the undeserving; it is also about godly living. Anything short of that is not God’s grace and does not bring salvation!

Of course, another of Satan’s perversions of truth is to promote the idea of “sinless perfection.” He encourages some to teach that there is a state of sinless perfection that we can reach while we are still in the flesh. It is a supposed state of “entire sanctification” and after we enter it we never sin again. Sadly that unbiblical teaching produces bad fruit: for some, delusion that they have actually reached such a state; for others, frustration, wondering why they can’t, yet afraid not to try; and for others looking on, disillusionment with the whole idea of Christianity and salvation.

John the apostle lived a long and fruitful life yet it was towards the end of his life he wrote, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” 1 John 1:8.

A New Relationship

We have already described the Lawgiver-subject relationship as one in which the fate of the subject depends upon his willingness — and ability — to keep the laws under which lives. But in the new covenant a brand new relationship is established: God becomes **Father!** Through the new birth we become **family.**

That was always God’s intent but sin separated us from Him. We were all born into a family that was ruled by the law of sin and death. Because of all that Christ did we can now be born again, this time into a family that has overcome sin and death, forever! What happened when Christ was raised from the dead and when He ascended to heaven foreshadows the destiny of every one of God’s children. All who are born of God’s Spirit partake of His very life.

God has not left us under the dominion of sin. Salvation is much more than forgiveness of sins and a ticket to heaven. As our Father God’s greatest desire for us is that we might grow up to be like Him. Everything He does for us is focused on that goal. He is fully committed and completely able to make it happen.

Just as Adam’s sin affects those who are born into his family, so does Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection affect those born into God’s family. They partake of the benefits of what He accomplished. His work gives us a real foundation upon which to stand. It provides the basis by which we can live a new life. We know that we cannot do it on our own and that is why God has provided this “new way of the Spirit.”

Think of a simple physical example. Samson was a man with an unusual call of God to

deliver Israel from its enemies. He was a man of legendary strength yet his strength did not come from his own natural ability. It came because the Spirit of God rested upon him, worked with him, and enabled him to do super-human things. After he was seduced by Delilah and left to his own strength he was easily overcome.

It is much the same with us. In ourselves we are no match for the power of sin to rule over us. But armed with the strength God willingly provides we can indeed overcome. The first step is to realize that this foundation and promise of God to us is real. A big part of what Christ did is “that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” Rom. 6:6. As children of Adam we were indeed slaves and sin was the master. But in Christ that relationship has been broken. Knowing and believing that is the first step.

Based upon that knowledge Paul tells us to “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Rom 6:11. That is the mental part, the warfare that takes place in the mind. Satan tries to tell us in a thousand different ways that we are still slaves but he is a liar.

It is as though you were once a slave but someone came and purchased you from your master and then set you free. But suppose you didn’t quite understand what had happened and based on long habit you continued to obey the orders of your former master. For all practical purposes you would still be a slave. It is safe to say that is the place many Christians occupy today. Satan still has strong holds in their lives. But God has better for us.

Paul continues, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.” Rom. 6:12-13. If we continue to yield to sin it will continue to master us, but we have been set free from that mastery and thus may now yield instead to God.

Under Grace

We are given the reason in verse 14: “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” Thank God for that! Whereas law actually strengthens the power of sin over us, grace gives us power to overcome.

A lot of people think of grace as some sort of vague benevolent attitude God has towards us in that He is willing to forgive and accept us even though we don’t deserve it. But it is so much more than a mere attitude. It is real help. It is actual strength. Its effect is as real in our spiritual man as was the physical strength Samson experienced.

The truth is that everything about salvation is based on God’s grace. God’s Spirit awakens

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us and convicts us of our need. That influence upon our hearts is an expression of grace. Yet without His help we could not even repent and believe. His grace overshadowing our hearts and wills makes it possible. And so it is with the entire process of rescuing us from sin's power and bringing us to full maturity, ready to live with Him forever.

Now, instead of a stern Lawgiver standing back and waiting to reward or punish us based upon our performance, we have a loving Father who freely offers the help we need to live as His children. He looks down lovingly and says, "Child, why do you struggle so? I know you are weak and unable. Look to me and I will give you grace, my enabling power. I give it not because you deserve it but because it pleases me to give it to fulfill my purpose for you."

"Not under law, but under grace" does not mean "free to do as we please." It means free to do as He pleases. A man who is under law is not free at all. He lives under a curse. Such a man can never please God. But in Christ the law has been removed from the picture altogether, perfectly fulfilled by Christ himself. We become free to serve God based not on fruitless self-effort but by the power God gives.

Grace is Greater

There is a great old hymn based on Romans 5:20 entitled, "Grace Greater Than Our Sin." I daresay most people think of the grace they sing about in this way: no matter how much I fail and come short God's willingness to forgive me is always greater. Well, thank God, that is true. But look at the scriptural context. "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. 5:20-21.

Paul is speaking of much more than forgiveness. He is contrasting the power of sin to rule over us with the power of God's grace to enable us to overcome. Look at verse 17 for confirmation: "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." God's provision of grace is given to enable us to "reign in life." And it is "abundant." That means there is more than enough. The issue at hand is "How do we live for God?" The answer is: "God gives us power to do it."

In the beginning we spoke about the many "commands" in the New Testament. What about those? Are they not "laws to obey?" Think about a proper earthly father. He has a

son and longs to see him grow up to be a man of character and maturity. During this process he often instructs his son in many aspects of living. It is part of the son's training. What is the nature of this instruction? Are the father's instructions "laws to obey"? Is the son in constant danger of being cast out if he doesn't measure up? No. Would the father ever tell the son to do something he knew he could not do? Of course not!

This is the true nature of New Testament commands. They are the loving instructions of our Heavenly Father to His children. They are given that we might understand the kind of people He desires us to be. He knows what we are capable of. He knows we can do nothing apart from Him. But with every instruction He offers Himself, His strength, His enabling power that we might be able to obey. What we could never do in ourselves we can do through the One who strengthens us. Phil. 4:13.

Every Command a Promise

Believers have long rejoiced in the promises but I believe the Lord would have us to see the "commands" in a new way. Since commands are really the instructions of a loving Father Who promises the help we need then for all practical purposes **every command is an implied promise**. Think about that! When God tells us to do something it is understood that He will help us to do it. That is His promise and so every command is really a promise!

That should set us free! Satan would do everything in his power to keep us in a state of failure, frustration, and condemnation. He has no right! Christ died for our sins — all of them. And He lives in us to enable us to live for God.

I certainly do not mean to imply that any of this comes without a fight. Sometimes the battle may be hot indeed. In fact it is a lifetime of warfare so long as we are in the flesh. The question is "How do we fight?" Do we struggle in our own strength or do we fight with God's strength.

Conquering Canaan

Think of the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan. God had promised them the land yet it was necessary for them to fight if they were to actually possess and enjoy what God had given them. It is the same way with us. God has given us everything yet we too must fight to possess our possessions.

But the Israelites did not fight alone. As long as they remained in obedience to God, God fought with them and their enemies had no chance. It didn't matter that some of them were giants. They were no match for a people for whom God fought.

And the Israelites did not fight every battle all at once! They fought first one battle and then another as God led them. We tend to feel overwhelmed as we become aware of the depth of our need but God is faithful to help us focus our spiritual efforts so that we can

win victories and then build upon them.

The battles we most need to fight are not the external ones. Rather they are the battles to gain victory where Satan has established strongholds in our lives. These battles will involve things such as lusts, habits, attitudes, character traits, and so forth. The Israelites fought for land. We fight for our own vessels that we might serve God and become more like Christ. Thank God we do not fight alone.

Obtaining Grace

We noted God's promise of "abundant grace." That is what we need. But how do we get that grace? Many readers will have already thought of Heb. 4:14-16 where the writer says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

We do not come before the bar of God's justice; we are invited to a throne of **grace**. We are told to come with confidence. We are promised mercy and help. That's what I need! How about you?

Most of our problems come from yielding to our old nature in some way, mostly from habit. God is seeking to bring us to a greater consciousness of our need to depend upon Him, to come to Him for help constantly. We need to live with a growing awareness of just how much we need Him. We need to *consciously* do what Paul said, to yield ourselves to God. That is an act of our will. It is an act of faith based upon God's promises and instruction to us. God responds to faith.

In more than one place we find the scripture, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 1 Peter 5:5. If we would obtain the grace we need to overcome then we surely must come to God with genuine humility of heart. Our situation calls for an inward honesty about our true need. Just as the sinner must come to true humility and repentance in order to be saved, the believer needs the same posture to receive the ongoing supply of grace he needs. Is that not based upon the truth? Do any of us have grounds to approach God with a spirit of pride, stubbornness, or self-sufficiency?

I'm thankful that God's heart is drawn to the humble. I hope that describes you. We have every reason to be humble before Him. We often feel shame over our failures but He does not despise us. He longs to wrap His loving arms about us and strengthen and comfort us. How He invites us to come and find in Him all that we need.

Commands and promises. They are really the same thing aren't they! ■

Who Are You?

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Of course not! You became a Smith by birth.

Obviously, after being born, there is a process of growing and learning how to live out that identity, but the identity itself comes about by birth alone.

One of the great dangers when it comes to God's kingdom is that those born into Christian families imagine that that somehow makes them Christians. After all, they grow up "going to church," singing the songs, learning the beliefs and practices. But it's not like that at all.

In John 3, Jesus spoke to a religious leader who came to see Him with questions. And that religious leader was a teacher. He was someone others came to seeking answers. His name was Nicodemus.

Jesus quickly began to speak of things that Nicodemus didn't understand. To paraphrase, Jesus told him, you have to be born again because if someone is simply born of flesh, that's what they are. That is why it's not enough to simply be born into the human family and adopt Christian religion.

The people of this present world are at a crossroads and are going to choose one way or the other if they haven't done so already. They will either be born into God's family, or they will remain in the human family. And the future of the human family is not a good one apart from Christ.

And so, Jesus began to talk about a different kind of birth. And the One who gives that kind of birth is God! It is from above. It is something that introduces into the heart, not just a new religion, but a brand-new life! Something has to happen on the inside that doesn't happen simply because you're born into a certain family and attend church.

That won't do you any good unless you really come to that place where God performs a miracle on the inside, gives you a new heart and a new spirit, and comes to live within you! You will not have what it takes to stand in this growing darkness. If you've never let Him have your heart and your life, you are still in that darkness.

Mention was made this morning about choices that we make. Even genuine believers sometimes make bad choices. But think about a young man born into the Smith family. If he makes bad choices, is he no longer a Smith? Of course not. He may need correction, but he is a Smith by birth.

I'm so glad the Lord doesn't throw us out when we fall short. He is faithful to correct His own. His love and faithfulness go way beyond that of the very best human parents. I'm so glad of that, aren't you?

But one only becomes part of God's family by the birth of which Jesus spoke. There is a radical choice that has to be made at some point in a

person's life. And until that point is past, they are still on the outside looking in, trying to be this or trying to be that, trying to find who they are. I'll tell you, I want to be His child!

We recently heard the testimony of one of our ladies concerning her baptism. She said that the thing that was most real at that time was this: "I'm losing my life." Well, that life needs to be lost. After you live a while, you begin to realize that this is a very temporary place. That lady, and many others here, were just teenagers then. Some of you were just kids and others weren't even born yet.

And now look at us. And here we are, feeling the infirmities of our age, and we're having to make new arrangements and see doctors. And we're burying people from time to time. That's the way of the world. That's the world you're born into. Don't just feel your youth and say, oh, I can make choices, it's my life, I'm going to do what I want with it.

Remember Jesus' words: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done." Matt. 16:24-27.

Those are pretty plain words! Now did He say those things because He is a mean tyrant, seeking selfish control over your life? No! It was because His heart was to share, at great personal sacrifice, the only life that truly is life!

Do you know why you're here? There's no other purpose in your being here except to come to know the One who made you! You have a temporary life in a temporary world — something we've said many times. But oh, the choices that we make when He begins to convict and to call people out of the human family into His family! Eternity hangs in the balance.

For those who respond, all earthly identities go away. It doesn't matter whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, or slave or free, or any of the things mentioned in the scriptures that tend to divide people. All those identities go out the window when we become a member of the real family!

That's the family that's going to live forever! And it certainly won't be because they're worthy, or because of any other thing but what Jesus did on the cross! He is the One who defeated this one who's fighting against us so hard! The battle was won at the cross! His blood cleanses from every sin that could ever separate us from a Holy God!

Praise God! Oh, but have you ever entered in? Jesus talked about passing from death to life. When a baby is born, it passes out of the mother's womb into the world outside.

There's a birth. It's a real event.

Being born again is also a real event. And it's not like you have to have a certain experience or anything like that. Everyone is different. Someone could have an experience that's very dramatic and for someone else it's just a very quiet surrender, very private.

Have you ever passed that point? Have you ever been born of God's Spirit and become a part of His family? That's the question that hangs over every single person on this planet.

Every earthly distinction ceases to matter, because the very world in which we live will one day be gone forever. You could live your entire life, and as Jesus said, "gain the whole world" (NIV). You could be the one that owns everything and everyone looks up to. You make all the decisions.

And you live out your life in grandeur and power and riches and pleasure, having anything your heart desires — and then you're going to die! And you're going to face Him, and everything you worked for will be burned up and forgotten! Do you realize that?

Does not the Lord say of the new heavens and the new earth, "...the former..." won't even, "...come to mind"? Isaiah 65:17. Do you think we're going to go through eternity full of regret, missing the things of this present world? There will be such a newness, such a freshness, such a reality, that God will put everything of the old out of our minds. It will be as if it never happened.

Talk about something being brand new! That's incredible! That's the family I want to be a part of! That's the family that God would build and nurture here! Praise God!

I think of some scriptures in 1st Peter that back this up. Peter is writing to some of God's children. He calls them God's elect. He mentions all the places where they live in the beginning of the book. And he says they've, "...been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..." That means God had known them long before they were born.

The fact is, He knew you before He ever started creating the stars. God knew about you! He knew everything that was wrong with you, and He still loved you.

But how does that choice work out? "...Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit..." What does "sanctifying" mean? It means set apart! That's the clearest meaning of the word.

Imagine if I wanted to acquire some silverware. And imagine that my only source was to go through all the junk shops around, pick through all of the dirty, tarnished, messed-up, bent, discarded silverware that had basically become junk. You and I would probably look for the "best" of the junk and leave the rest.

But God is not like that! He would pick through the junk and say, "There's one that's

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Who Are You?

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bent and tarnished, but I'm going to take that one. That's in My pile. And here's another one. That's in My pile." We serve a God who can take you from the junk heap, clean you up, unbend you, and make you fit to serve a king, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords!

All of the "silverware" is worthless, yet He has the heart and the power to fully restore those He chooses. That's the God that we serve! Folks, I want to be one of those!

But there is a sanctifying work that God would do. He's a Spirit and He will come and work on your heart and convict you, dropping thoughts into your mind to show you your need. The real question is, what do we do when He does that? Do we resist and fight and put up our guard and just demand, "Go away and leave me alone; I'm okay; I want to do my thing"?

Or do we say, "Yes, Lord. I'm exactly what You say I am. I am a sinner in need of a Savior. I cannot help myself and I don't deserve Your help, but I'm listening. And I believe the words of the promise, the hope of the Gospel. I've heard your words, Lord, and they have touched my heart and I embrace them. I let go. I gladly hand over this life that I cannot keep anyway. I give it to You, and I receive You into my heart as my life, as my Lord, as my Savior"?

God knew you before He created the first star. He went out to look for you when you weren't looking for Him. I wasn't either but He came looking for me.

He didn't come because He thought I was special, better than anyone else. I have exactly the same need as anyone else! If there's someone reading this and you're in prison because you've done horrible things, know that I am no better than you are! All human beings are born with a nature that drives us to do the very opposite of how God means us to be.

And there is no religion that can fix that. There is only a Savior who reaches down deep inside, gives us a new heart and a new life, and then helps us learn how to live that life! Listen to how Peter puts it. He's exhorting us as to how to live and how God wants us to live. In verse 22 of chapter 1, he says, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth..."

See, there's that choice. Truth is going to come. What do we do when it comes? There's an obedience that has to happen, from the heart. "...Obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers..." You know, you don't have anything that could be described as real genuine love, unless He, the Author of love, comes in. We can sort of like each other, for very selfish reasons. But the kind of love that he's talking about here, only God can put in our hearts. That's what we need. "...So that you have sincere love for your brothers,

love one another deeply, from the heart."

Okay, how does that happen? How can I do that? "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." When God speaks it's like planting a seed and there's life in that seed. And our hearts are like soil.

Remember Jesus' parable in Matt. 13 about the different types of "soil": which are you? Hard? Shallow? Weedy? Or good?

Anyone God ever saves, no matter what it takes, is going to look back one day with incredible gratitude that He would go to such lengths to cross their stubborn wills, reveal His love and perfect provision, and bring them to the point of surrender.

When He comes to us, He doesn't say, "Measure up and I'll accept you." He says, "Come broken as you are. Give me your heart, your life. I'm the only One that can rescue you and make you what you need to be! I'm the only One that has the power but you're going to have to give me your heart and your life! It won't be yours anymore, it'll be Mine!"

"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed..." Human life just doesn't have the power to endure. It has been corrupted by death. If you're born into Adam's family, that's all you've got. You're going to die, and so will everyone else that's born into Adam's family.

Peter continues, "...but of imperishable..." The kind that cannot perish. If God can die, so can we who know Him and have been born of His life. It's His own life that He shares with us. "...Through the living and enduring word of God."

Now, let's look at the world and see it through God's eyes: He says, "All men are like grass..."

Do you actually believe it is worthwhile to glory in this present world, to strive to make a life for yourself here, to accomplish "great things" in the world's eyes?

"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fail, but the word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the word that was preached to you. Therefore..." because of all of this, because you've got a new life in you, now, "...rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind."

So, how do I do that? We're going to have to go to the Source. We're going to have to say, Lord, your plan for me is not me, but it's You in me. I need You. I need You to set me free. I do not have the power to be the person You've called me to be, but You do.

There is only One who's ever lived the Christian life, and that's Christ! And the Gospel is about Him coming and living that life again through me.

Listen to how that happens. It's just kind of like a human family, isn't it? It says, "Like new born babies..." — they're born, but they're still babies — "...crave pure spiritual milk..." — we

better get something from Him — "...so that by it..." — by that spiritual milk, by what we get from Him — "...by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

I don't know who this is for, but I just pray that God will work with needy hearts. You may be one that has just gone along, and you've never come to that point where you have passed from death to life. That is a one-way trip, all your bridges burned behind you, and you are His, come hell or high water.

If you haven't done that, you are in an incredibly dangerous place. You have no idea what's coming! But God loves you enough to look you in the eye and say, "You need Me."

"As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

God is building Himself a house. He likens those who are His to the stones that are used to build a literal earthly temple. Though each of us is unique, if we are born of His Spirit, we have been called into a relationship, not only with Him, but with one another! We become an eternal part of something far greater than this world could ever offer.

If you want to enjoy the fruits of truly being a part of the family of God, you had better have Him in you. You need to have been born of that Spirit, because events are going to unfold where, if you do not have Christ in you, you will fall. You will embrace the growing darkness, and you will feel like you did the right thing. That's a scary thing. That's where we're at in the history of this planet.

But I am so glad that God is patient. If He weren't patient, He would have ended things a long time ago. Look around at the things that are happening in the world — and they're going to get a lot worse.

But this is who, by God's grace, I am: I'm His. I cannot look in the mirror and see any reason why God would choose someone like me. And that applies to everyone He chooses. But that's the kind of a God He is. Thank God!

Peter continues, "But you are a chosen people..." Is that your identity, or are you just sort of going along with what others around you believe? Have you ever truly entered into this? Has it ever really become yours? Have you crossed that bridge and literally burned it behind you? Have you opened your heart and said, "Oh God, I am a sinner, and I need a Savior? Please come in. Take my life. Make me the kind of person You need me to be." I pray that if you haven't, you will.

This is the result: "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood..." That means we're in a position to help other people, because God's in us. "...A holy nation..." separated to God.

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Who Are You?

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That certainly has its implications as to how we live and the kind of people we are! But basically, it means that I am His, period! I'm not the devil's.

Now the Lord may allow that devil to fight, and he does. We have seasons where we do go through all kinds of battles, but we have a God who fights those battles with us if we'll trust Him and stand fast. There's a time when we are called to stand. I mean, having done all, what do we do? Stand, because God is faithful, and God is strengthening the hearts and the faith of those who have to fight. "Fight the good fight of the faith," He says.

Peter continues, "...a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God..." — Are you part of this? — "...Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

What now? If God's talking to you, you need to respond to Him. First of all, it has to be you and Him. The Lord does tell you to repent and be baptized, doesn't He? Repentance is turning from your own life and your own way and giving it to Him and recognizing that if you follow your own way, it's going to lead to death. You say, "Lord, come and give me Your heart and Your new life, and change my heart."

And then, there is that testimony, that public testimony. But this is between you and Him. If He's talking to you, you don't have to wait. It's not a fancy prayer. It's not certain words. It's reaching out from the heart and saying, "Oh God, I need a Savior today. I put my faith in You now, today. Come into my heart, and be what You have promised in Your Word. Lord, I don't come because I'm anything or because I'm worthy, none of that, Lord. I just come as I am, 'Just as I am, without one plea,' but that Christ died for me."

If you do that from your heart, you'll know it. Others around you will begin to know it. And I believe God will put it on your heart to desire to be baptized.

There's a time that God is going to bring everyone of His to that point of decision, that point of choice. Is this your day? I don't know. All I can do is put the Word out there and say, God, You're going to have to do it. Pray, Christians. Pray that God will convict those who need convicting.

The saddest thing is for someone to grow up, to hear all of these things, to go along, to act like you're part of it, and then you get to a point in your life where you turn and go your own way because it's never really taken root in your heart. Do you think you're going to find it somehow in yourself to go on and be a good person? If it isn't in your heart, the darkness out there will swallow you up.

I warn you, I promise you, that there is Someone who sits on a throne, who went to a cross, because you and I needed a Savior. He willingly came down, humbled Himself to that cross. But He didn't stay in that tomb, did He? He proved, by His resurrection, that He holds the keys of death and hell. That's the One I want to serve.

If you miss this, you miss everything. If you see this and humble yourself and put your faith in Him, you gain everything, regardless of how events play out in this world. If you have Him, you have everything. If they walk up to you with a sword and cut your head off, are you going to be the loser? You'll be the winner. That's a one-way trip out of this broken world to a perfect place!

Do we really believe the promises of God that this world is not where it's at, that He has something beyond all this? If that's the case, then we can say with Paul, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." You want to talk about the kind of interest that pays eternally? There's where your investment needs to be. It's in Him and in the Gospel.

It comes back to this. Who are you? When we talk about being chosen, being His children, are we talking about you? That's a fair question. I pray that everyone here who is unsure, will begin to seek God from the depths of your heart until you know, because He will help you, if you really want help. He loves you with an everlasting love. Praise God!

Broadcasts

Television Broadcast

— (30 Minutes Weekly) —

Local Broadcasts

Albuquerque, NM - KAZQ - TV 32
Sun. 7:30 AM

Birmingham-Tuscaloosa, AL - WVUA TV-23
Sun. 6:30 AM

Cheyenne, WY - KGWN TV-5
Sun. 6:30 AM

Chicago, IL - WJYS TV-62
Sun. 7:00 AM

Greenville, SC - WGGG TV-16
Sun. 7:00 PM

Jacksonville, FL - WTLV - Ch. 12 HD
Sun. 6:00 AM

Joplin, MO - KODE - Ch. 12 ABC
Sun. 6:30 AM (Starts 4/4/21)

Lansing, Michigan - WLAJ-DT 53.2 CW
Sunday, 6:30 A.M.

Los Angeles, CA - KDOC-TV 56
Sunday, 6:30 A.M.

Macon, GA - WGXA TV-24
Sunday, 6:30 A.M.

Milwaukee, WI - WMLW-TV 49
Sunday, 7:00 A.M.

Minneapolis, MN - WUCW-TV CW23
Sunday, 6:30 A.M.

Minot-Bismarck-Dickinson-Williston, ND
KBMY/KCMY 17/14 - Sunday 7:30 A.M.

Monroe, LA - KMCT-TV 39
Sunday, 7:30 A.M.

Palatka, Florida - WJGV-CD 48
Sunday, 6:30 A.M. and Monday, 3:30 A.M.

Phoenix, AZ - KASW-TV CW6
Sunday, 6:30 A.M.

Pittsburgh, PA - WPGH-TV FOX
Sunday, 6:30 A.M.

Rapid City, SD - KEVN-TV 7.1 Fox
Sunday, 6:00 A.M.

San Francisco, Oakland, California
KBCW TV-44 - Sunday, 6:00 A.M.

Sioux City, IA - KPTH TV-14 CBS
Sunday, 6:30 A.M.

Springfield, MO - KOZL TV-27 My Network TV
Sunday, 6:30 A.M. (Starting 4/4/21)

Topeka, KS - KTMJ TV-43 FOX
Sunday, 6:30 A.M. (Starting 4/4/21)

RADIO STATIONS

Monday - Friday

Stat.	Freq.	Location	Time
WDJS	102.5 FM	Goldsboro, NC	9:00 AM
WEMM	107.9 FM	Huntington, WV	11:00 AM
WDJS	1430 AM	Mt. Olive, NC	9:00 AM
WWVA	1170 AM	Wheeling, WV	9:30 PM

Short Wave Radio

WWRMI Radio Miami International
South America and the Caribbean
Mon.-Fri.: 9:45 AM Eastern time - 9955 KHz
North America and Canada
Mon.-Fri.: 7:15 PM Eastern Time - 9395 KHz

Voice of Hope World Radio Network
South, Central, and West Africa
Mon.-Fri.: 1530 UTC
4965, 6065, 9680, 11680, 13680 kHz
Available via live webstream at:
www.voiceofhope.com

TV Network Broadcast

— (30 Minutes Weekly) —

The NRB Network (DirectTV 378)

Sunday - 6:30 AM Eastern
Monday - 3:30 AM Eastern

VTN - Little Rock Arkansas

Online or Cable
Sunday - 1:30 PM Central

SacFaith TV - Sacramento, CA

Monday - 8:00 AM Pacific Time
Tuesday - 8:30 PM Pacific Time
Watch Online or on Cable Channels
Comcast 20 / AT&T 14 / Consolidated 19

Please pray "...for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel..."
Ephesians 6:19.

Visit Midnight Cry Ministries on the web:

www.midnightcry.org