

live." Paul stated it this way, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Rom. 5:1-2). The way of faith takes God at His word. It trusts Jesus and His sacrifice to take away our sins. When my faith leads me to genuine repentance and to a burial with Him in baptism, it is His blood that forgives and gives me a right-standing that I have not earned and do not deserve. Actually, what I have is an imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:5-8). It is not of debt but of grace that I am declared righteous. And, I might add, it is this grace which continually provides the blood of

Christ by which I can daily stand in righteousness before God and have fellowship with Him (1 Jn. 1:7).

Paul speaks of the "righteousness of the law" (Rom. 8:4). That is, the righteousness which was demanded by the law and could only come by perfect law-keeping. Paul says that this right-standing that perfect law-keeping could have produced can be fulfilled in us. How? Remember, it doesn't come by perfect obedience. Then how? By grace on God's part and by our faith accessing that grace. When my faith leads me to repent and be baptized and to "walk according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4), then I have full faith that God's grace accepts "such a worm as I" (Ps.

22:6). Truly, I can praise Him for imputing to me a righteousness which I have not earned and be as Abraham of old, who "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3).

One other thought: God's grace is not a license to sin. I cannot reason that since I am saved by grace that it doesn't matter whether I try to follow His will or not. His will was given for the purpose of our striving to follow it in our lives. Our faith takes Him at His word and seeks to walk in His way so long as we live. Understanding His grace helps to have full assurance as we walk humbly with our God. (1989)

-- Forrest D. Moyer, 1989 ~

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Covenant

by Allan Turner

The concept of covenant is significant in business, social, political, and religious relations. According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, "covenant" is "1: a formal, solemn, and binding agreement: Compact 2a: a written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action." A covenant then is a binding agreement between individuals or groups of individuals. This is the meaning of the word as it was used in the case of Isaac and Abimelech (Genesis 26:28ff.), and Laben and Jacob (Genesis 31:44). The main object of such early agreements was the promotion of peace. In fact, the Scriptures refer to just such cases as "covenant[s] of peace" (Numbers 25:12; Isaiah



11:1; I Kings 20:34), it is the covenant between kings and their subjects that we wish to give special attention in this study. Duties, obligations, or services required of subjects by a sovereign were the special concern of a covenant called "a suzerainty." Understanding this is the key to understanding the use of the word covenant in the Bible. The suzerainty addresses the relationship between God and His people.

Religion And Covenant

"Religion" literally means the bond that unites man to God. This is exactly the biblical concept. Religion is constantly represented as the observance of a covenant with God (Deuteronomy 29:12; Jeremiah 31:1,31,33). Those in a covenant relationship with God are de-

54:10). The word "covenant," as it developed, actually became equivalent to peace. Conversely, a "broken covenant" symbolized war (I Kings 15: 19).

Although covenants were made for mutual support and protection (II Samuel 3:12, 13), the fulfillment of common obligations to third parties (II Kings 11:17), and even in submission to a superior enemy, which obligated both parties (I Samuel

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scribed as being at peace with Him. Those who are not in a covenant relationship with God are portrayed as being at war with Him. As long as the Jews practiced true religion under the covenant made at Sinai, they were to receive the blessings of God, but if they broke it they were to be cursed (Deuteronomy 11:28-32; 30:10,15,19).

Breaking Covenant

Although the covenant Jehovah made with Israel was described as "perpetual" and "everlasting," we understand these adjectives to be representative of what could have been. As long as the conditions of the covenant were met, the covenant would be in force. The covenant's perpetualness or everlastingness could only be destroyed by a breach of the covenant. Historically, the everlasting covenant Jehovah made with Israel was broken. Because we already know the integrity of God would not allow Him to violate His part of the covenant, we realize it must have been broken by Israel (Deuteronomy 31:16,17,20; Isaiah 24:5,6). In Hebrews 8:7 & 8, the Hebrew writer wrote: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them [God said he would make a new covenant]." By breaking the everlasting covenant, Israel declared itself to be at war with God. The fact that He continued to honor His end of the covenant, as much as He could under the hostile conditions that existed under the violated covenant, is only indicative of His integrity. Israel rejected the

sovereignty of God and had to pay the penalty for being at war with Him. The destruction of the Jewish nation was not a pretty sight, but it was a fate that nation had brought upon itself by breaking the covenant and declaring war on God.

A New Covenant

In the midst of the hostilities between Israel and God, the Lord announced His plans for a "new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31-34). As a manifestation of His great love, this new covenant was to be an even better covenant" with "better promises" (Hebrews 8:6). To insure its success, the mediator of this covenant would be none other than the Son of God Himself. In the end, no mediator ever gave more to insure any treaty (Romans 5:6-10). It was through this new covenant that those of us who where alienated and enemies could be reconciled to God (Colossians 1:21-23). But notice that even under this new covenant there were conditions that had to be met. We can continue to be reconciled by this new covenant so long as we "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (verse 23). Under this new covenant, we can never fall from grace or the promised blessings of God if we add to our faith certain prescribed things (I Peter 1:10). Under this new covenant, we will continue to be cleansed by the blood of Christ if we continue walking in the light (I John 1:7). This walking in the light is conditioned upon our confessing our sins (I John 1:9). We must never forget the condi-

tions of this "peace" that now exists between God and His people through the New Testament or Covenant.

A Sealed Covenant

It was, and still is, the practice of sovereigns to place their seal upon a written covenant or treaty. In addition, parties of a covenant were often required to provide something of value to prove their sincerity. This "proof" was called the "earnest." As we are the "epistle[s] of Christ" (II Corinthians 3:3), it should not surprise us that the Holy Spirit is given to each Christian (cf. Acts 5:32; Galatians 4:6) as a seal or earnest of God's willingness to carry out His part of the covenant (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). Some have erroneously thought that because we are sealed it is impossible for us to be eternally lost. This is the same idea Israel had under the Old Covenant (Isaiah 59:1-2). They had fallen from God's grace and instead of blaming themselves, they wanted to blame God. This is exactly analogous to those who preach "once saved, always saved" today. Instead of placing the blame for "falling from grace" on themselves, they want to blame it on God. These people need to understand that although God gave His Spirit to Saul (I Samuel 10:10), when Saul disobeyed Him, God took His Spirit back (I Samuel 28:15,16).

As we walk circumspectly in this New Covenant today, let us not forget that if we are to continue to be at peace with God, then there are conditions to be met.

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Grace and Righteousness

It seems to me that so many members of Christ's body have a grave misconception of the role of grace in our right-standing with God. Because of this many feel insecure in their relationship with God. They tend to rely on their own righteousness, and, realizing their frailties, imperfections, and shortcomings, lose heart or become fearful that they might miss Heaven. The fact of our imperfection is precisely why God's grace is provided and why it is so valuable in our lives.

Why Law Cannot Produce Righteousness

In a law system such as we see in the Mosaic age, absolute obedience is required in order to produce righteousness. "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.' Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for 'The righteous man shall live by faith.' However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, 'He who practices them shall live by them'" (Gal. 3:10-12). Those who feel that right-standing comes only by law-keeping (any law) must



them" (Deut. 27:26).

What Can Forgive Sin?

Law cannot forgive sin. You will have to rely on something other than law to have right-standing. The fact is that no one perfectly keeps the law (except Jesus). For that reason, "no one is justified by the law before God." It is this realization of our falling short that often makes us miserable in our religion because we feel that we must render perfect obedience to be right, but we don't!

If we cannot obtain right-standing by law-keeping, then by what means does it come? Enter the grace of God. You see, God loved us

even when we were sinners (Rom. 5:6-9). That love provided a way through Jesus Christ who came and who died in our place and for our sins. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). But how do we gain access into this grace and thus obtain righteousness? The answer is plain. It is by faith. Our text above says, "The righteous will live by faith." Or to put it another way, "The man who is right with God by faith will

face up to the consequences of their choice. That choice demands total and perfect law-keeping. "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them" (Lev. 18:8). If you miss one little point, you are a law-breaker (See James 2:10). Now, if you are a law-breaker, you are a sinner and are not "righteous" and cannot stand before God, but are under a curse (v. 10 above). "Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing