

Leadership And The Covenants (Part Ten)

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We are going to begin in John 8. I want you to know what it is that we have in a sense that is so unusual when compared to the world.

John 8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide [meaning continue, or remain] in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth [this is what we have that separates us from everybody else, we have the truth and if you believe it, it will . . .], and the truth shall make you free.”

This sermon is number 10 in my series on leadership and covenants. I embarked on this series because I grew concerned that because of the many faith-destroying subtleties of the influences of Satan's many forms of Christianity out there in the world, we might be deceived into failing to appreciate how singularly important what we possess is.

In a way my sermon is given in order to help you more fully appreciate this truth that we have. What is it that we have that is so valuable? It is truth regarding two major building blocks to successfully live life by means of faith. As we approach the end I cannot urge this on you enough: faith is going to increase in importance as we go along.

First it is truth regarding God Himself. Secondly, it is truth regarding what is God's purpose. We are going to go back to the Old Testament, to the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 2:1-3 And He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.” Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. And He said to me; “Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.

I chose to begin with this scripture because Ezekiel is directly addressed to Israel, not Judah. But Ezekiel was a Jew. When Ezekiel was in prison when he was given this prophecy, this book. It never got to Israel until long, long after Ezekiel was dead and it got to Israel in the form of writing, either in the book of Ezekiel when the Bible began to

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be printed, or it got to Israel when ministers who had become Christian to some degree in Europe began to preach to the Israelites who were In Europe.

Why is this important to us? Because now there are a great many Israelites in the United States of America, and it is an end time message that is based upon what happened in Ezekiel's day or just before Ezekiel's day, whether to Judah or Israel itself, it does not matter because it was repeated.

Please turn to Ezekiel 34. I have used this verse a couple of times but it is so important to understand the times that we are living in, and what it is that we are living through, and why I am giving this series of sermons.

Ezekiel 34:7-9 Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: "As I live," says the Lord God, "surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock" Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord!

God is making clear in this chapter that one of Israel's most serious flaws (this is end time stuff), was the lack of godly leadership. Be aware this lack was not limited to those in top governmental and religious positions. The lack permeated all of the culture's parents, our shepherds. Parents are expected by God to be leaders of their families. The leadership was bad everywhere within the nation. This is end time stuff. Ezekiel in a sense is just getting to Israel.

Please turn to Isaiah 1. We will see that the same thing happened to Judah, about a hundred or so years later.

Isaiah 1:4-8 Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up or soothed with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.

Isaiah 3:12 As for My people, children [could mean those who are younger, but it may also figuratively mean those who are children in terms of maturity] are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err; and destroy the way of your paths.

I chose the book of Isaiah because Isaiah was primarily a prophet to Judah. Do you see a common pattern in the reporting by the prophets? People's minds were obviously on things that did not please God, and thus their conduct did not please Him either, and God reacted. Both nations were devastated and scattered to the four winds. Lack of leadership did them in.

The attitudes driving the citizenship of both nations were similar to what we are living in at this very time. If we are not going to be dragged along with them, in our lives, we have to do something to defend ourselves against their suffocating influences. Righteous leadership is needed for good fruit to be produced. We are experiencing the effects of an anti-God leadership in this nation. From its beginning the leaders of this nation have proclaimed the nation to be Christian, however, that claim was never true.

I went through a whole series of sermons showing that the founders did indeed draw godly knowledge from the Bible, and placed it in our nation's constitution. As a foundation for many laws, that was good, but the hearts of the people, though sincere, were not truly converted to God's truth. Thus Americans could not maintain a high sincere belief level that the nation began with and the results are what we see and hear in the news reports every day now.

The question, as I begin this sermon is, are we doing anything, actively, godly, to protect ourselves from this anti-God onslaught from the world around us? In this message I am going to suggest something that may be missing from our life. Why? Because a broader, deeper understanding of God and His purpose is always helpful.

I will reflect on the time when Evelyn and I began fellowshiping with the Pittsburgh congregation, in early July of 1959. It was not at all uncommon for members to refer to the church as the truth. That is what they called it, because it was an acknowledgment of a fact that they strongly believed, they realized the fact that the membership of the Radio Church of God, as it was at that time, possessed what other churches calling themselves Christian did not have. That something was the truth regarding God's purpose.

I do not know exactly why the truth was so important to us. For some reason though, in

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many ways, that fact was apparently more obvious to us then than it generally is to members today. It may be an accretion of time, because 50 years later we have seen everything, done everything, we participated in everything, we have written everything, we become hardened through the commonality of things. Perhaps it was partly because in 1959 the entire American world was a great deal more biblically oriented than it is now.

But people out in the world who are 25 years younger than Evelyn and I, they sneer at the 1950's, they sneer at the music, movies that we watched, bands that we danced to, because it was so tame. It was not exactly godly, but it was way cleaner than what we have today. There is no comparison.

In those years the Bible and the Christian religion in general provided a dominant sense of direction in people's lives. The Radio Church of God stood out, sharply, from the other churches calling themselves Christians. It had more in common with Jewish religion than it did with the Christian religions, thus Satan's world categorized the Radio Church of God as being a Jewish sect. It was not of course, and it never was, but that is all that was necessary for those in the world to be satisfied with identifying us so that they could comfortably categorize us. That was the world's way of carelessly sanctifying us.

To them we fit comfortably into a niche that they felt they understood, but to those of us who were fellowshiping together, because of what was revealed to us, we called the church the truth. That is what stuck in our mind, the church had the truth. Members would say in conversations with one another, "when I came into the truth. . ." To us it was clear in our minds that we had a positive package of belief's that marked us as clearly Christian. The impact of the belief in truth far exceeded what might appear to that casual observation that the world made (that I mentioned earlier).

To us the term truth meant something. Truth became the motivation, not merely for a church organization but for us the church was a cause—it was a cause for us to live by—it drove us to make unusual significant sacrifices in our personal conduct in behalf of the church. When we began attending in Pittsburgh, the attendance was about 100 people. That congregation was the only Radio Church of God congregation between Chicago and London, England. Nothing in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, you had to go across the pond to get to another congregation.

That meant something to us, we were the outlanders of the Radio Church of God. Being insignificant did not bother us, because despite seeming to be so insignificant, our level of intensity regarding the truths we held drove us like it is doing to you: to keep the

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Sabbath regardless of our insignificance. It motivated us to tithe our incomes, to keep the annual festivals, drive long distances, and use two weeks of time to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in Big Sandy, Texas.

Following the Feast of Tabernacles in 1962, our oldest daughter was visiting at a girlfriend's home two or three doors from our home. Somehow the conversation got around to where we had just been. Our daughter told her friend's father that we were just in Big Sandy, Texas. His response was, "You mean to tell me that your family went all the way to Texas and back in your automobile?" Considering our car he thought that was pretty amazing thing that we had just done.

I think I shared with you before an extreme example, but it illustrates how sincerely dedicated that members were to the truth. There were three single men and one was a married man, and they all lived on the same route to Pittsburgh. The man furthest away lived in Canada on the north shore of Lake Ontario, two more lived in western New York State, along Lake Erie, and the married man lived in Erie, Pennsylvania. The Erie to Pittsburgh link, the last one in this long drive was still almost 100 miles, this was in the days before Interstate highways. Those men hardly ever missed a Sabbath service, or choir practice, and Spokesman's Club on Sunday. After Spokesman's Club they returned home link by link all the way to Canada.

The last I heard, the man who lived in New York had died (he was the oldest of the four), the others to the best of my knowledge were still in the church. It did not wear them out, they are still there exercising their faith.

There was a time in my life in the church that I truly marveled at many of these things, but now I realize, partly for the wrong reason. My wrong reasoning was that I attributed too much credit of what I admired in those men and women who did these things. I do not want to take anything away from them, they fulfilled their part and that was honorable and it was right, but their part was not the only part, nor do I believe it was the dominant part.

We must never overlook the fact that God is the Creator, He is the potter, we are the clay, we are the handiwork, the created product. We do not initiate the correct spiritual response that glorifies the Creator God, nor do we provide all the spirit and the drive and the energy required to make those sacrifices. I think that in the ensuing years since those events took place, I now understand accurately about God's involvement regarding grace, sanctification, justification, crucifixion, and the Holy Spirit.

To understand what is happening in our lives more accurately we must take into

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consideration the source of these spiritual influences, and the relationship of them in our life, in order to reach a correct conclusion regarding their impact on us. I think that we need to grasp elements of our spiritual life more thoroughly, especially grace.

Genesis 6:5-8 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

To me the term grace expresses God's most important characteristic regarding our creation, and salvation. I will try to prove that to you as we go toward the end of this sermon.

God's grace begins everybody's history. I am beginning here because it is the first place that the term grace appears in the Bible. Noah was absolutely not the first person to experience God's grace. Adam and Eve were, preceding Noah by over 1500 years of time, but God chose to begin revealing His grace more clearly at this point, and so we will begin here too. That is one factor.

A second factor overall is: we must have in our thinking processes at this point that grace is not merely a New Testament phenomenon. God's grace existed from the beginning, I mean the very beginning.

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

We are talking about the beginning, and Jesus Christ, who was the Creator, the actual one who fashioned everything as it were with His hands, He was full of grace and truth. When He became a man nothing changed in regard to that grace, it was still there.

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These verses establish that Jesus Christ was with the Father in the beginning. He was already God, and He was full of grace and truth. John is reporting that grace and truth were part and parcel of what Jesus Christ was.

Ephesians 1:7-9 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself.

Turn to I Peter. We are establishing that grace has existed from the beginning. It is not something that applies only to our salvation, it is in a sense the whole story, from beginning to end.

I Peter 1:18-20 Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

These two sections of verses, Ephesians 1 and I Peter 1, compliment the previous one, John, by confirming that even before they began creating the environment for mankind to live in, then mankind itself, God already intended to graciously forgive sins through the payment Jesus Christ made by His sacrificing of His life. Grace was already in operation as things began.

A researcher named Fisher made this statement regarding grace, "Grace is God acting in accordance with His own character and being." What this man said is true. Therefore, as long as God has existed—He is eternal—grace has been part of His nature and character. It is eternal.

As things begin to take shape here we are going to find out that God's grace is responsible for everything that He has created. Grace is God acting in accordance with His own character and being. Grace means not only a divine attribute, it is not just a thing, it is God Himself. God is love, God is grace.

In other words, every act of God is full of grace, because that is what He is in His nature. Thus grace existed from the beginning of this creation. Grace's source is God

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and is equally shared by Jesus Christ, who is also God. Though He is a personality distinct from God the Father, He is at the same time one with Him. They are of one mind, in perfect alignment, and that includes Their graceful nature.

I will give you a basic definition and usage of the term grace as it is used in the Bible. This is going to take a little while because even though the biblical use is tied to a Greek root, the apostle's use of it is *greatly* expanded from that root. I want to do this because the world has confused clear understanding regarding grace by concentrating their teaching about grace in one area. That area is indeed important to our salvation, but their doing this perhaps unintentionally helps limit our appreciation of it, because God's expressions of grace are far broader than to be limited to providing us with salvation.

Most of the usages of the term grace in the Bible are found in the New Testament, thus on the surface it appears to draw much more from the Greek language than from Hebrew. However God is the author of the Bible, not man. Human languages are no barrier to His operations and purposes. Therefore, even though the Hebrew language is not as specifically definitive as the Greek language regarding grace, the principles that cover what grace is are clearly found in the Hebrew Old Testament, because God was there too.

Because grace existed from the beginning, expressions of grace in the Bible are not limited to the Greek language. The Hebrew term translated grace in Genesis 6:8, is transliterated into English as khane, but it is pronounced as if it was chen. It means almost exactly the same things as the Greek term charis. Both terms are used to indicate one being favored, blessed, or gifted. Thus the term grace itself did not originate in the Bible, but was of a common secular use in both languages. Neither word is specifically spiritual in common usage. Both Hebrews and Greeks tended to use them to describe human qualities that are gratifying of manner.

We can see this usage by describing a dancer as being graceful. It indicates the dancer was gratifying in the manner in which they danced. Even that usage gives an indication that the secular Hebrews and Greeks believed that a graceful person was gifted or favored, they might even say it came from the gods—not the true God. Whether the person deserved the graciousness was not the issue with them. The person was simply gifted and this gave gratification to others because they enjoyed the gratifying manner.

Neither the Hebrew term nor the Greek term had any overriding spiritual qualities attached to them from common usage. Each term was lacking. Here is what I believe happened over a fairly brief period of time during the church's beginning. We are up now to the time of the apostles, in time. Here is a truth: every organization like nations,

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companies, corporations, and even families develop their own terms that are significant to them but may mean nothing to those outside the organization. The terms sometimes arise as a result of some significant event. For example, in the Worldwide Church of God, we had Y.O.U., Y.E.S., S.E.P., M.R.P. They were specific terms for the Worldwide Church Of God but nobody else. In the case regarding grace, I believe what happened is that it was God to the rescue inspiring the teachers to be placed in the church to a better usage of a term.

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.”

The commission to preach the gospel to the world, I believe played a major role in the use and development of the Greek term charis. Every author in the New Testament used the term charis. I have no proof for this but here is what I think happened because history shows it happens commonly regarding languages.

Are you aware how many words the English language absorbs every year? I do not know what they are but there are more words in the English language than any other language on earth, and it is the language more people on earth speak, especially in business and education. Because of the use of the English language it keeps absorbing other languages terms to put to use in the English language.

The Greek language had no term that would express in a moment the awesome greatness of the nature of God the Father, and the Son, and what they wanted to use to express to its own members and to the world as the apostles preached. The Hebrew language did have such a term, it was not chen, remember chen means the exact same things as charis. Why did they look to the Hebrew language? First the word that they were looking at and used expressed much the same as the Greek charis, and if they used chen, it would not do for their purposes. Here is the Hebrew word—hesed.

The next question is: why not just use the Hebrew term? Why did it have to be Greek? We all understand that the apostles were born into, grew up in, and were converted in a Hebrew speaking culture.

Romans 3:1 What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed

the oracles of God.

At the time that was written where were all the oracles of God? They were in the Old Testament, they were written in Hebrew, they were committed to the Jews, and the Jews became responsible for preserving the Old Testament. Now using the Hebrew language to spread the gospel, language-wise everything was in place while they were located in Judea, but outside of Judea, while taking the gospel to the world in the dominating language, the one most people understood was neither Hebrew nor the Latin of the Romans, it was Greek. Just as English is understood all over the world in our time, in the time of the apostles Greek had that same position to the wider world beyond Judea.

We can look back from our point of history, and determine that God wanted the Hebrew portions of the Bible preserved by the Jews in the Hebrew language, but regarding the New Testament He willed it to be preserved in the Greek language, and that is the language the apostles were going to use to spread the Word of God.

The word grace had to come from the Greek language using a Greek term, but the Greek language did not really have a word that fit the glory of the Great God. It really did not describe Him, so what they did, I could say, they stole a word from the Hebrew language. They did not really steal it, they simply adapted it. They took the word and applied it to charis, because the grace was already in position in the term itself, but they used the definition of hesed, along with simply being favored.

There were two reasons that the word had to be Greek. God willed the New Testament to be preserved in Greek, and the Greek language dominated the world's means of verbal communication outside of Judea whenever the apostles evangelized.

What does the term hesed mean? In one term it captures the essence of God's nature. In Strong's Concordance, word number 2617, it is a powerfully descriptive term used 240 times in the Old Testament scriptures. It is used most frequently in the Psalms, which overflows with descriptive terms, but here is one of the greatest of all. It is translated into English sometimes as one word. It is actually two words that are written as one.

A description of God is—loving kindness. That is what He is, that captures His essence, but there is more to it than that. It is also translated in the Old Testament as kindness, by itself, steadfast love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, goodness, devotion. That is already quite a package of vivid description, but there is more.

The description from Strong's continues as "One of the most important words in the vocabulary of Old Testament theology and ethics, in general one may identify three basic meanings of words which already always interact with each other." Listen to what this term suggests regarding God. First is, strength, power. Second, He is steadfast, faithful. Third, He is the personification of love.

"Any understanding of the word that fails to suggest all three inevitably loses some of its richness." The simple basic sense of charis is like *chen*, in English, favor. Both words by themselves are inadequate, so the apostles, under God's inspiration, the Bible writers, primarily the apostle Paul, expanded the emphasis of charis to be more along the lines of *hesed*, without removing any of the unearned, undeserved, graciously given gifting from God that could honestly be preached using charis. They added to the definition of charis what they drew from *hesed*, because charis by itself was not enough. It did not show the power, it did not show the faithfulness, it did not show His loving kindness.

In so doing what the apostles did is they created a beautiful descriptive teaching device by shifting the biblical emphasis, by that I mean its spiritual emphasis. They did not mess with the public's common usage of charis. They did this by how they used the word charis in their sermons and letters. In common public usage the emphasis was on the human subjects having *received*. What the apostles did though, their usage after adding the qualities of the Hebrew *hesed* to the Greek term charis, they then switched the emphasis of what charis now describes to the *gracious giver* of the gifts. If it was not for the giver there would be no gifts.

They shifted the emphasis to God Himself as the giver. It looked just like the word charis or grace, but when they expanded it in their sermons and their writings, charis became *hesed*. Doing so was absolutely appropriate so that we might have a right relationship with God. Because we are now better able to appreciate the amazing loving kindness of our Creator God, because *hesed* is humbling, if you understand. It is humbling to the receiver of what God gives. This is why we have to look for understanding.

The next thing that we must understand is this: the favor, or gifting, shown given by God in the Bible, is not solely focused on salvation itself, or even on forgiveness. God's loving kindness, His strength, steadfastness, and His loving favor is much more widely distributed than that. So listen carefully to what the book of James teaches us.

James 1:16-18 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. [He is constant, permanent, He is always graceful.] Of His will He brought us forth by the

word of truth, that we might be kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

James 1:16-18 [Amplified Version] Do not be misled my beloved brethren, every good gift and every perfect (free, large, full) gift is from above, it comes down from the Father of all [that gives] light, in [the shining of] Whom there can be no variation [no rising or setting] or shadow cast by His turning [as in an eclipse]. It was by His own [free] will that He gave us birth [as sons] by [His] Word of Truth, so that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures [a sample of what He created to be consecrated in Himself].

This reassuring and beautiful enthusiastic assurance from James follows right on the heels of his teaching regarding the temptation to sin. James is providing us with a dead-on contrast. Basically what he just said, is God in no way ever tempts us to sin. How can a person who is full of grace be a temptation or give a temptation? That is not the way He thinks, it is not the way He acts. He most certainly allows us to be tempted to sin, as He did with Adam and Eve, but the choice was theirs and He did not give them the choice until He prepared them to face it. They flunked. Out of grace He did not wipe them away, He did not blow them to smithereens. No temptation ever comes from Him.

Testing is necessary for His creative activity and His rendering of judgments regarding us. James is saying that evil is not part of God's character whatsoever. Temptation is evil, it must be resisted by us. Everything that has its source in God is always positive and has good purposes. They, meaning every good and perfect gift, are His grace at work for mankind's benefit. Make sure you remember this: *every good and perfect gift are His grace at work for mankind's benefit.*

Just as a reminder. I want you to think back to Genesis 1, and the way it is written, the story of the creation, but now I want you to look back at all the acts briefly described there as God's gifts to us. That is the way we have to look at Genesis 1. Everything He did there was a gift to you and me. That incidentally is what David Mass reflected on in his sermon last week regarding music. God created seven beautiful notes and gave them to us as a gift and when they are combined with each other in a virtually endless number of variations they produce all of the music that has ever been made, whether good or bad.

In like manner everything God made that is so simply described in Genesis 1, but so complex in the uses we are able to make them, is a gift of God's grace that we might have a wonderful full life as He shapes us into His image so that we might share what He is with all of us for eternity.

I do not care what it is He created there, whether it was spirit, air, coal, oil, water, salt, clay, bacteria, viruses, mosquitoes, monkeys, elephants, lions, tigers, gorillas, bears, gold, silver, platinum, uranium—it was all made for our well being and given as a gift for us to use from His grace. Because God in His wisdom said we need that to keep things balanced, and they can use this.

He is strength, in all of its good ramifications. He is steadfast, faithful forever, He never changes, there is no shadow of turning. He is love and love gives good gifts forever and ever.