

Growing in the Grace of God #14 - Characters of New Covenant Life & Service Part 2

by Bob Hoekstra

New Covenant living involves renouncing self-sufficiency and relying on God's sufficiency, resulting in characteristics such as godly sincerity, living epistles, and humility.

Duration: 47:17

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 23:46, Acts 7:51, Romans 15:17, 2 Corinthians 2:16, 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, 2 Corinthians 3:6

Topics: "New Covenant", "Faithful Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the power of the New Covenant ministry in transforming people into living messages of Christ. He uses the example of Stephen in Acts 7, who boldly preached to the religious leaders and ultimately gave his life for his faith. Despite facing persecution and death, Stephen's message had a profound impact on the early church and continues to inspire believers today. The speaker also challenges the idea of needing commendation letters or credentials to validate one's ministry, highlighting the importance of being a faithful follower of Christ.

Transcript

In study number seven, characteristics of New Covenant life and service. We saw a couple of characteristics of New Covenant life and service as being led in triumph and then having our lives a fragrance of Christ. We're talking at break time.

I can sure see the personal application of, you know, this looked good, this opened up, this developed there, but oh, how impossible here, and oh, what a shock there, and how impossible overall, and now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph. Rosemary is asking me how I've been doing, and I'm, you know, just amazingly well. Amazingly well.

And it isn't a circumstantial thing. It's nice to be blessed by God. He can also change circumstances.

It's not like circumstances mean nothing. Sometimes God wants to change circumstances. Sometimes He wants to change us by the circumstances.

But it really hit me how much it is a non-circumstantial thing. In fact, it's in spite of circumstances. It's like on many fronts, though God's doing greater things we've ever seen in living in Christ's ministries, and more opportunities than we can even begin to keep up with and all, still there's just a lot of impossibilities,

a lot of things we're waiting upon the Lord for, like our kids for their house to sell in Corona so they can get down and full time in the ministry and all.

And I love to study, teach, and write, and travel and teach and all, and doing a lot of administrative things, you know, on a human side. I'd say that's, you know, kind of a loss, a defeat kind of, but now I just see God working in all of it. And what a joy to know if we just let Him lead, whatever the circumstances are, we know He's leading us in triumph.

That can bring just a tremendous inner peace and sense of rest and hope. And we want that more and more in our lives, that characteristic of just knowing we're being led in triumph and that this fragrance of Christ is wafting out of our lives, blessing God and touching everyone else in the way God sees they need to be touched. Here's another characteristic of New Covenant living.

A godly sincerity develops. Second Corinthians 2.17, just to go right on down the verse by verse. Second Corinthians 2.17, For we are not as so many peddling the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

A godly sincerity just develops as we share the word, as we walk, as we minister. And it says here, we, New Covenant servants, we who are New Covenant servants, we are not as so many peddling the word of God. Back then there were those who had peddled the word of God.

Merchandise it, use it for self gain. Treat it in a way that whatever seems to work that you say and do out of it or with it is fine. Peddling the word of God.

Many did it then, many do it today. Oh, the merchandising of the word, using it for self gain instead of for Christ's glory, using it to build personal empires and self-justification and self-exaltation instead of building the kingdom of heaven. We are not like many peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity.

In sincerity, as of sincerity, it's translated in this version, New King James. Genuine, real, that's what New Covenant servants become. They become those who minister, but as from God.

Not speaking out of their own, not operating out of their own resources, but as from God. We speak in the sight of God in Christ. Our ministry, our testimony, our teaching, our sharing, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

We speak not to impress man, but to bless God. We speak in the sight of God and we speak in Christ. His message, His authority.

This is a fantastic verse of reality of ministry. We are not as so many. Who are we? We are New Covenant servants, 2 Corinthians 2.6. And that makes us not like many who peddle the word of God, use it for self instead of let God use it for glory.

But as of sincerity, genuine reality, as from God, God is supplying what we are giving forth. And we speak with God watching, in the sight of God. We do it in Christ, the place from which we live and minister.

Godly sincerity develops as a characteristic of life in New Covenant servants. Corollary verse right here in 2 Corinthians, just across the page, chapter 1, verse 12. For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God and more abundantly toward you.

Again, the Apostle Paul, as he ministered, he ministered not with fleshly wisdom, not with human resource, but in simple godly sincerity. In other words, by the grace of God. We're talking about growing in the grace of God and New Covenant being the grace of God.

Here, 2 Corinthians 1.12 ties the work of the grace of God into a life of godly sincerity. It's God's grace at work on and in our lives. It makes us genuine.

It's not like, I'm going to be real. You know, no more phony, no more fake, no more pretend, no more image. I'm going to be real.

Well, nice desire, but how are you going to pull it off? I mean, really? Has to be God at work, you know, has to be God at work. Well, New Covenant servants have that blessing. God can just mark our lives because it's his grace at work, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God.

We walk in godly sincerity. Boy, what marks to have upon our lives. Lead in triumph, a fragrance of Christ, and a godly sincerity.

God hates hypocrisy. And oh, what a shame to his name and to his cause. We become pretenders and phonies and hypocrites.

Well, praise God, there's a way to walk in godly sincerity. Just walk in the terms, the arrangement of the New Covenant, and then God makes us real. He who is real makes us real.

He who said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. He is reality, and he makes us real. What a blessing.

We want to be real, but praise God, it's not a load on our shoulders. How'd you like the task of being sure you were never phony, never unreal, never pretentious? You know, what a task, huh? Makes us chuckle. Well, it's a characteristic of New Covenant living.

And here's another one. Letters of Christ. Our lives can be characterized as being letters of Christ when we walk under the arrangements of the New Covenant.

2 Corinthians 3, 1 through 3. Do we begin again to commend ourselves, or do we need as some others epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? I remember I was witnessing to a guy in Dallas once. I was a pretty young pastor, and I was maybe in my early 30s, and these two people who were having trouble in their relationship, one was new to the church, the other one didn't even want to come to church. And he was kind of irritated, as usual.

She was coming to church, he didn't want to. That's the most common pattern. Not universal, but most common when there's a difference like that.

And she had me over there to their place, and he was hating every second of it. She's asking questions, and I'm just pumping out the word. He finally got irritated enough to join in, and he got right in my face.

He said, who gave you the authority to do this? I said, well, I guess the Lord. Well, who are you? What gives you the right to come into our home and speak like this? And I said, well, I guess the Lord. Well, who are you? I said, well, I'm just a disciple of Jesus Christ.

No, no, no, I mean, what are your papers? He was trying to nail us down. And I had no appeal, but I'm just a nobody follower of the Lord. And you either take it or denounce it on those terms.

That's kind of what this verse is like. Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you? Or letters of commendation from you? We only receive by ministry if I, you know, give you this commendation letter signed by the 20s biggies in the evangelical world. I mean, what is needed? Then Paul gets right down to it.

You are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read by all men. Clearly, you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God. Not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of flesh.

That is, of the heart. That is a soft, human, pliable heart, not a rock solid heart. Verse 1, Paul kind of says, do you think I'm trying to write my own reference letter here in this epistle? Or really, he goes further and says, do you even think I need one? Verse 2, he says, you are our letter.

The people to whom we minister become the letter that validates our ministry. I remember one day hearing someone saying to an older church leader, oh, this man's a real leader. You should invite him to your staff.

You know what that older guy said? He said, show me the people he's leading. I want to see if they're following him and where. Wow, I never thought in those terms how right that is.

The people to whom we minister, they become the letter that validates or invalidates our ministry in many ways. That doesn't mean everyone we minister to is going to become a great on fire disciple. But do they at least know what the issues are? Do they at least know the gospel? Know reality? Know where we stand? Or are they a follower of us instead of a follower of the Lord we follow? The people we minister to can become that wonderful letter that validates God is at work.

A letter read by all men. There are a lot of people, it has been said, who though they won't read one epistle one day, one time out of the Bible, they're reading you every day. And sometimes really carefully.

Rereading you, you know, watching, measuring, seeing. And if God is at work there, praise God. At least they're going to get an introduction, a living epistle, you know, in that sense.

Yes, usually they're watching to see if they can, uh, aha. It's one of the favorite reasons they often watch, you know. Aha! And you call yourself a Christian? You know, it's one of the favorite.

But praise the Lord, you know. They are watching. And by the grace of God and the miraculous faithful work of God, the ahas might diminish and the oohs might, you know, whoa.

Hey, maybe there's something real about you, you know. Maybe this Jesus thing is real. But that's true.

Though often they're reading, wanting to come to the wrong conclusion, you know. Nonetheless, God can, you know, he could grab them. He could grab them.

Letters of Christ. Verse three. When true new covenant ministry takes place, it makes people letters of Christ.

Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us. Paul ministered to them. They became an epistle of Christ.

Written not with ink, but by the spirit of living God. Not written out on tablets of stone, but written inside on hearts. This is God making a human being a living message carrier of who he is.

Written on hearts by God. New covenant ministry can be used of God to turn people into letters of Christ. Where their lives become a living explanation more and more of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A great example of this is Stephen in Acts 7. Acts 7 at the end. Remember that great sermon? You talk about a bold preacher. He's standing before all of the Israeli religious and cultural power structure, recounting the whole history of God with Israel.

In Acts chapter 7, toward the end there, before verses 59 and 60, verse 51. You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

How's that for concluding your message? And here's the application part. You're just a bunch of stiff-necked hearts and just like your forefathers. And verse 54.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart. They gnashed at him with their teeth. They wanted to grind him to powder, and they took him out and stoned him.

Look at verse 59. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God, saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. What would I be crying? They were stoning me.

Hey, come on, guys. We can cut a deal here, you know. I mean, what would your flesh just want to cry out? Is this what we would want to cry out? Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice. Lord, do not charge them with this sin. What I'd be crying out.

Lord, a lightning bolt would be appropriate right now. Barbecue them, Lord. Fry them now.

I'm your child. I mean, this is astounding, really, when you think, how would you behave? When you just preached one of the great sermons in the history of the workings of God, and they're killing you with stones. Now, obviously, who does this remind us of? Into your hands, I commend my spirit.

Father, forgive them. They know not what to do. I mean, it's exactly like the Lord Jesus Christ.

You talk about being an epistle of Christ, a reproduction of Christ. And at the moment of the greatest test for man, the threat to life. My word.

And the letters just being read by them all. And obviously, had a great impact throughout the history of the church. It impacts our lives.

We read that. Oh, Lord, how real, how amazing. And no doubt, impacted Saul of Tarsus, too.

Standing there, watching over the murderer. You know, having a hard time kicking against the bricks. I mean, he wasn't just chatting or sermonizing.

I mean, he was hitting as heavy home as you could with where they were, where God was, where they needed to be. And the cost of his life immediately began to bear fruit. You know, people say, well, hell.

Again, doesn't that look like defeat? Stephen, one of the great young men of the early... Come on, just when you need leaders the most, we're just starting this whole thing out. Oh, the wisdom of God, though. He could have rescued him from that, spared him from that.

He did not. He's been touching lives for almost 2,000 years. Not to mention the immediate ones that were touched right there.

Again, he was being led in triumph. Even though it looked like major defeat. But what an epistle of Christ.

What a letter of Christ. That's what the Lord wants to do in our lives. As we walk in humble dependence upon him, he wants to make us letters of Christ.

The Holy Spirit at work on us from the inside out, writing a message. On our heart, on our inner man, the Holy Spirit. This is not external religion.

This is not rules to live up to. This is not evangelical peer pressure, where you kind of shape up. I mean, this is a living epistle.

God doing the writing, this time not on stones externally, but inner life, heart internally. And then that comes forth as a life to be read, a Christ-like life to be read. And the thing is this.

This is just one of the characteristics of New Covenant living. 2 Corinthians 3, we saw in verse 6, that this is about New Covenant servanthood, this section of the Scripture. In verse 16 of chapter 2, Paul said, and who is sufficient for these things? Who can live like this? Who can carry out a life on this plane, this level? Come on, always led in triumph, fragrance of Christ, wafting out, touching everybody and blessing God.

Then it goes on, becoming a sincere person, godly sincerity. And then a letter, who's adequate? Do you know anyone who can make themselves like that? Is the implication given? Who is adequate for these things? The answer is in verses 4, 5, and 6. And we have such trust through Christ. Many versions translate that confidence.

And we have such confidence through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves. But our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant.

Not of the letter, but of the spirit, for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life. Such confidence, such trust, such expectation we have through Christ toward God. Such trust, expectation, confidence to be led in triumph, to have this fragrance of Christ coming forth from us.

To be those who grow in godly sincerity. To be those who become letters of Christ. That kind of expectation, trust, confidence, that that can happen in our lives.

We have such trust through Christ toward God. The reason we can expect, trust, have confidence that such things can take place in our lives has nothing to do with our sufficiency or our resources. We have such trust through Christ toward God.

Because we're one with Christ, we are in the family of God. God's resources are now available to us. See verse five, it's not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves.

This triumph that we can be led in. This fragrance that can be wafting out all the time more and more. This godly sincerity that can be growing.

This becoming a living epistle. We do not consider that our sufficiency is producing any of it. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything, anything eternal, anything life-giving, anything life-changing, anything glorifying God.

We're not sufficient in ourselves to think that any of this comes from us. But our sufficiency is from God. Though none of this that we can walk in sources in us or from us, it can all come to dwell within us.

Because God lives in us. Christ in us, the hope of glory. Our adequacy, our sufficiency is from God, who made us sufficient as servants of the new covenant.

Servants of the new covenant. Those who will walk with God under the terms of the new covenant. Not living by the letter, but by the spirit.

How important is that? The letter kills, but the spirit gives life. We'll talk more about that later. That's such a big critical issue.

But just to conclude what we've looked at so far. New covenant Christian living. What is the heart of it? What is it about? We're seeing here what it produces.

We've seen characteristics, victory, fragrance, sincerity, living epistles. We're seeing the consequences of new covenant living. But what is that new covenant living all about? Well, these verses get right at the heart of it.

It's having trust through Christ toward God. New covenant servants living in the new covenant. It involves renouncing self-sufficiency while relying on God's sufficiency.

We're again talking humility and faith, which we've touched on before. Humility and faith. How do you live daily by grace? It involves humility and faith.

Not the striking kind of issues that man is drawn to. Humility. I can't produce it.

It's rather humbling. But we're willing to live that way. Hey, God said it.

That's true. We'll agree with it. Why are we fighting that? We can't change it.

That's the way it is. God said it. Let's just embrace it.

Okay, we're not sufficient. There, I said it. Hey, I wasn't so bad after all.

Wow, in fact, that's kind of liberating. You mean it doesn't depend on my sufficiency? Hey, wow. Boy, something's happening here.

What a blessing. I mean, it almost sounds like his yoke is easy, his burden is light. We are not sufficient.

Humility. But then faith. We trust there is a source of sufficiency, and it's from God.

Our sufficiency is from God. New Covenant living involves renouncing self-sufficiency and relying on God's sufficiency. It's admitting that we are completely inadequate in ourselves to live the Christian life.

But we are fully adequate in Christ to live it. It's not the great American approach to religion. God helps those who help themselves.

That's the American approach. Far rather, it's God helps those who finally admit they can't help themselves. That's New Covenant living.

John 15, verse 5, sure echoes this, illustrates this, reminds us of this. John 15, 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing.

How adequate are we? How sufficient are we to produce spiritual fruit? How much fruit can we produce on our own? Zero, zero. How do you say it? Zip, nada, nothing. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

That is so humbling. I wonder, do we agree with God on that? It depends, that's right. Depends on our present frame of mind, whether we're beside ourselves or sane.

Whether we're seeing a right or we're kind of fogged out. Whether we're walking in self-confidence and it seems to be working. Or whether we're trying and it isn't working.

I mean, this is something to embrace. Apart from me, you can do nothing. I'll admit, I don't fight that near as much now as I used to.

But early on as a Christian, man, I thought that was for wimp Christians. Surely Jesus wouldn't have said that if I was in that crowd. Or he said, some of you can do nothing.

I mean, I'm more serious than these other half-baked believers. You know, the flesh is so self-righteous, you know. It only applies to the laity.

Yeah, that's right. It only applies to... Oh, man. Don't you just hate that? We're just in the leaky boat.

Yeah, that's right. If you're just in the leaky boat, you can bail out, yeah. If the leak isn't too big.

If you drown in an ocean, you start to believe this, yeah. Really, only for the laity. I remember doing a study, I think it was out of 1 Peter 2.9, entitled, We Are All Laity, We Are All Clergy.

It was blowing my mind. I didn't realize that when I first started out. But in that one verse, the words from which we get laity and clergy, both are used in that one verse to talk about us.

The people of God. People, that's the laity. And that we are royal priesthood.

That's the cleric or the clergy. Yeah, same terms applied to every Christian. Yeah, all these divisions the flesh comes up with.

Yes, this also applies to the clergy. I can hardly say that word. That's taken on such an ugly... A man of the cloth, you know, what do you wear, you know? Isn't that cloth? Yeah, what are you wearing, metal? Oh, me.

Here's what we're to embrace, though. Without me, you can do nothing. To the extent that we fight that, doubt that, we're not willing to walk as a new covenant servant.

We, in some fleshy, self-serving, self-hoping way, think we can cut it under the law. Just tell me what to do, you know? Oh, man, I won't do it perfect. I'll be there for God's 10% boost.

You know, I'm not totally self-sufficient. But this is what a new covenant servant embraces. Apart from you, Lord, I can do nothing.

If we won't embrace that, it allows us room to compete. We know we can't be perfect, but we used to be better than somebody. That's right, yeah.

And better than I was yesterday. No, not at all, really. Absolutely.

That competition thing between us and between us and the Lord and the Spirit just makes room for the flesh. And we're to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lust thereof. We're to live by what Christ provides, not by what human resource can manufacture.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. A new covenant servant hears that and goes, yes, that's me. Praise the Lord, I see it now.

I agree with it. And Lord, in any way I act and talk and behave and relate, show me if it's not in line with this. Apart from you, I can do nothing.

It's agreeing with God. It's humility imparted from God in what He says and working on us and in us to embrace it, to agree with it. You can do nothing.

But faith, I am the vine, you are the branches, He who abides in me, bears much fruit. We can have abounding fruit as Christians. How? By abiding in the vine.

All of the life that produces all the fruit comes out of the vine. What a thought. Just like a grape branch, everything that branch needs, not only to exist, to carry on, but to be fruitful, is found right there in the vine.

That branch does not have to manufacture something to add to what's missing in that vine. It's all right there in the life of the vine. As long as that life of the vine flows through that branch, what comes out? All of the life that produces all the fruit comes out of the vine.

What a thought. Just like a grape branch, everything that branch needs, not only to exist, to carry on, but to be fruitful, is found right there in the vine. That branch does not have to manufacture something to add to what's missing in that vine.

It's all right there in the life of the vine. As long as that life of the vine flows through that branch, what comes out? Fruit characteristic of what? The life in the branch or the life in the vine? The life in the vine. That's our faith.

That's what we believe. That's what we trust. That's what we count on.

We depend. We stake it all on that. That Christ lives in me.

This true vine will share his life with me. And he is the fruitful one, the faithful one. And that fruit is that fragrance of Christ too.

That sweet orange blossom aroma. Life is coming forth. Philippians 4, 13.

Philippians 4, 13. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. That's the confession of faith of a new covenant servant.

But we'll really embrace that to the extent that we say, apart from him, I can do nothing. But through him, I can do all things that he wants me to do. I think the American way to memorize and quote this verse is, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

What? I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. What? I'm missing part of that verse. The key isn't in the I can, it's in the through Christ.

Because you take the through Christ out and I can do nothing. That would be our confession. If you take the through Christ out, because we're backed apart from him, I can do nothing.

But as true as it is that apart from him, we can do nothing. It's just as true that through him and the strength his life provides, we can do everything he wants us to do. What a glorious arrangement.

The new covenant is so fantastic. You'd think it's just grace upon grace. We can't do anything.

Through him, we can do everything. Everything he wants us to do. How important is Christ to the new covenant servant? He's critical.

He's critical. It all hinges on him and our relationship with him. The other day, Rob, if you were here, if this is your church home and you hadn't be at that service, he was teaching and he got a little, you know, contemporary audiovisual on us.

He had a glove in the pulpit and he pulled out the glove and he was talking. I forget precisely the verse, but the point is very clear. You know, what can this glove do on its own? You know, glove, pick up that Bible.

You know, glove, go rake the yard. You know, glove, go steer the cart. You know, what can the glove do? Apart from that hand, it can do nothing.

You know, and then he just popped it on. Now that glove can do anything that hand wants it to do. Yes, tell us.

Oh, yeah. Then he pulled out the hammer. He had it.

Now this glove can whack his hammer, pound nails, bust heads, whatever. Depending on your calling and your ministry. Depending on whether you're Nehemiah or Ezra.

One pulled their own hair out. The other one pulled other people's hair out. It depends on your calling, I guess.

But that's such a wonderful aspect of it, you know. In many ways, spiritually speaking, we are like that glove. There is a difference.

We relate to that hand. You know, that glove is inanimate. So a lot of these things break down, but we can see that in other parts of Scripture.

But as far as producing, being sufficient, making it happen. In that sense, we're like that glove. We need that hand.

But praise God, we aren't some inanimate glove. We're a life that knows we need that hand, you know. And we can be increasingly convinced how much we need that hand and how able that hand is.

Because we're relating to that hand. And oh, when that hand is filling our existence, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. In fact, Major Ian Thomas gives a great lesson with that very illustration in his book on Romans 5.10 called The Saving Life of Christ.

We know how we're saved by his death. That's what the previous verse says. If we're reconciled by his death, how much more shall we be saved by his life? If his death took enemies and turned them to friends, reconciliation, how much more will we be saved, now that we're his friends, rescued, delivered by his life.

Rescued from fruitlessness, from defeat, from you name it. Saved by his life. Great title for a book.

And it's quite a book. The Saving Life of Christ. I don't often recommend books.

They're just so hard to find unless you have a good library of ancient classics. Well, that's a good one. Major Ian Thomas, The Saving Life of Christ.

He was not some ivory tower theologian. He was a great biblical theologian. He was a mighty preacher.

He's still preaching. In fact, he's coming to San Diego County, I think, here soon. And the Lord used him to start this worldwide torchbearers, cape and ray missionary outreach centers all over the world.

So that hand went in the glove of his life and really produced. That's a picture of New Covenant living. New Covenant servanthood.

And in conclusion, let me give you a couple of verses that are good to add. In conclusion, let's go back to Jeremiah 31, just to keep tying these ancient promises of the prophets right into what we're studying and walking in the New Covenant. Jeremiah 31, 31.

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord. I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. And the end of verse 33.

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, says the Lord, I will put my law in their minds. Write it on their hearts.

I will be their God and they shall be my people. These are the very things we're picking up in 2 Corinthians chapters 2 and 3. That fulfillment of the promise of the New Covenant, the work of the Holy Spirit within our lives. And this matter of humility and faith.

James 4, 6. God is opposed to the proud. But He gives grace to the humble. Yeah, that's it.

The hand of God. Is He opposing our walk? All it takes is the finger of God, you know. There we are.

We're chugging along. We're going to just be great for God, you know. But if it's in self-sufficiency, that's a form of pride.

If it's, I can do it if I try harder, that's pride. And letter of the law, legalism, you know. We're just running headlong into the hand of God.

God's opposed to that. No progress in that. But for the humble, those who say, I can't lead my own life in triumph.

I can't make a fragrance go out all the time everywhere that blesses God and touches people. I can't make myself sincere in godliness. And I can't make my life a letter that just speaks Christ when people look on, you know.

Just humbly admit, I can't do that. Well, God gives grace to the humble. He gives the enablement that produces his will in and through our lives.

I was listening to John Corson the other day. By the way, a wonderful teacher of the grace of God and has a wonderful grasp on the new covenant. In fact, he was talking about the new covenant and he immediately shifted to other language, grace, and they're so interchangeable.

And he said something like this, God's grace always works into us what God wants out of us. Well, that's a good way to put it, you know. There's so many good ways to say this, you know.

But God's grace works into us what God wants to see out of us. And that fits this kind of section of scripture so well. God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.

And then our last verses for the night. Familiar ones but great ones to read in this context of study, Ephesians 3, 20 and 21. The end of that great prayer on the fullness of God filling our lives, which we've looked at before in the Holy Spirit covenant study.

Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. To him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

What a new covenant doxology that is. What a doxology of praise to the grace of God. It's ascribing unto, calling for glory to be given to God in his church by Christ Jesus.

And he's called him who is able. Now to him who is able. See, in the new covenant, the ability flows from God.

Now to him who is able to do, the ability to do, God at work. To do what? Exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. Boy, that's some ability.

We can ask pretty big things at times. If you're like me, you can even think bigger things than you ever dare ask. Have you ever done that? You're just thinking about things to talk to God about.

No, no. I can't ask that. Staggers our faith.

It doesn't stagger his ability. But he's able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or even the things we think about and never get to ask him about. He can do those too.

How does he do it? According to the power that works in us. His power. His mighty resurrection power.

So to him be glory. New covenant servants gladly give all the glory to God because they know it all was of God. By God.

For God. Through God. All those prepositional phrases from last week, right? In the covenant of relationship.

In Christ. Christ in us. By Christ.

Through Christ. Those great new covenant prepositional phrases that just magnify who he is, what he's done, what he can do to him. Be glory.

He gets the glory in the church and all of his people. He gets the glory there in the church. How? By Christ Jesus.

By what he does through Christ in our lives. Oh, so many years ago, it began to hit me that as a believer, I needed the Lord Jesus Christ and needed to exercise faith and dependence in him and keep my attention on him as much today as the moment I was saved. Oh, how I saw my desperate need for him at salvation.

Guilty, alienated, far off, unrighteous, unholy. Oh, he became my only hope and yours. And how many times along the way he was just like there to, you know, kick in if I needed him, you know, OK, Lord, see, I'm struggling here, you know.

No, it's OK now. Thanks. I got it.

I mean, we need him as much today as ever. God gets glory in the church by Christ Jesus. Not these mighty great things we do for God, but what he does by Christ Jesus in us, in his church.

And may that be the way it is to all generations forever and ever. This is the way God wants to work with his people, that Christ be their life. New Covenant servants, as we walk this way in humble dependence, I can't, but he can.

I'm inadequate, but he's totally adequate. I can produce no fruit, abide much fruit as we walk that way, which is what New Covenant living is all about. God just marks our lives.

He establishes in our very existence, in our being these characteristics. They come from walking this way with God. Who's adequate for these things? Nobody.

But walk in God's adequacy and these things result. That's the implication of these words. That's a fantastic statement from God.

Triumph, fragrance, godly sincerity, epistles of Christ, their marks God puts upon us, in us and through us as we walk in humble dependence upon him. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for making it so clear in your word and giving us a time and place like this to just sort of meditate out loud together, think together with you and each other and your word.

Lord, this is the way we want to live. We want to walk as New Covenant servants, not our sufficiency, but yours humbly depending on you and watch you mark our lives in these ways for your glory and for the touching of others. We pray you'll do this, Lord, lead us in this path for your glory sake, for your namesake, for the building up of your church and the reaching of the lost.

We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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