

God's New Covenant Miracle

by David C. Needham

Do you expect to fail? Have you resigned yourself to a life of defeat, constant as the setting of the sun? Or do you believe that you are truly a child of God, victorious in Christ Jesus?

The radical difference between old covenant and new covenant life is vividly apparent in two of the greatest intercessory prayers in the Bible. One, in 2 Chronicles 6, comes from the lips of King Solomon as he dedicates the temple to God. The other, in John 17, is Christ's prayer for His own.

Solomon's prayer is saturated with the tragic expectation of failure. From 6:21 on through verse 39 he pleads the mercy of God as he anticipates the repeated sinning of his people. One cannot read these verses without feeling the almost morbid heaviness in that repeated refrain, "Hear Thou and forgive!"

If this prayer were made to fit our times it might go something like this:

"When I cheat, use drugs, mess up my life morally or reject Your will in marriage; O Lord hear and forgive." (A teenager's prayer.)

"When I lose my temper, gossip, or waste my time watching daytime TV shows; O Lord, hear and forgive." (A housewife's prayer.)

"When I pull a shady deal, cheat the IRS, tell an off-color joke, or flirt with my secretary; O Lord, hear and forgive." (A husband's prayer.)

These are all defeatists' prayers!

In sharp contrast, Jesus' prayer for His own does not contain one solitary word that would anticipate our failure! In fact, the force of His prayer in John 17 is best summed up in the closing words, *"that the love with which you did love Me may be in them, and I in them."*

Something utterly amazing was happening. This new covenant miracle would be echoed and reechoed throughout the remainder of the Bible.

"If then, you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above" (Col. 3:1).

"So that you may approve the things that are excellent in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10).

"Now the God of peace . . . equip you in every good thing to do His will" (Hebr. 13:20,21).

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might abound? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1,2).

Yes, we know that since Jesus has come and died for us, our sins are all forgiven. That's right! But there is so much more. Forgiveness alone does not produce holiness.

The miracle of our new covenant union with Christ has brought about an actual change in our identity. Why is it that sinning should *not* be the norm for God's people today? Because producing sin is totally incompatible with our essential nature. That person we used to be—our "old man"—was crucified, dead and buried with Christ. We are *now* actually alive to God. We are no longer "sin-producers" but "righteousness-producers." To live in reality is to order our lives on the basis of this liberating fact; to live in fantasy is to assume we are

still spiritual paupers destined to failure. No! We are members of His royal family, partakers of His very nature.

Paul could not have expressed this fact more pointedly than in Colossians 3 as he describes the garments that should be put off. Why put them off? Well, simply because they don't fit; they are out of style; and if that were not enough, they are totally unbecoming of who you are. Oh yes, and one more thing, they no longer belong to you!

Paul then follows with his description of God's fresh spiritual wardrobe. Our name is on the door! No, we didn't buy them, God did! We certainly cannot take any credit for having them. They are all of grace. But they do belong to us and we must make the choice to wear them!

Then there is that other wardrobe—the armor of Ephesians 6. But the issues remain the same. We didn't create the helmet and shield. God did! But *they do* belong to us, because all that is His is ours. Simply amazing! How very right for God to say to us, "Wear them! Use them! And don't worry about the fit. I made them personally for you!"

It is the same with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. God says "Pick them. Share them!" No, you and I didn't grow them. God did. He's the Vine and we are the branches. But since they are the natural product of the vine, they *are* there, nestled in among the branches which are abiding in the vine.

As you read this, are you struck with God's optimism concerning you? Please don't allow those shallow flesh-level identities and desires to cloud the absolute wonder of the fact that you in deepest identity are God's new creation, His workmanship. You are free, truly free to live with all the rights and privileges of your authentic citizenship. Royal blood runs through your spiritual veins! Isn't it wonderful that you and I can say these marvelous things and think these joyous thoughts without a hint of any egotistical pride? The glory is God's! We live only because His life flows into us. We *are* because He is!

It is out of this wonderful truth that John could write, "*My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*" (I John 2:1). And though we still have our flesh, our unredeemed mortality, we are not "*in the flesh*" for "*whatsoever is born of the Spirit is spirit.*"

Is it too good to be true? Have you measured yourself so long by flesh-level standards of personal worth that you find it difficult to accept the Christ-reflecting loveliness of your own inner man? There is freedom in that fact! Freedom to live. Freedom to take a deep breath of the fresh winds of the Spirit that are blowing from our homeland. Freedom to sense and release the fragrances of genuine holiness.

Many years ago when my wife and I were first married, we looked with surprise out of the kitchen window one day at a blur of black and white as it zipped around the corner of our home. In the days that followed we discovered that the "blur" was actually a terribly-frightened stray dog. In time he would dare to drink our water and eat our food, but not when we were around. The moment he would see us at the door, he would run away as though he knew he did not really belong. Certainly he was not worthy of our love and care. How could he trust our invitations to come closer? Gradually his fears subsided, and instead of running he would simply sit a ways off and cock his little head. He so much wanted to be loved! He so wanted to be accepted. But could he, would he, trust our gentle words? No, they were too good to be true. To think that anyone would actually consider him to be of value; that someone would truly desire him.

Finally, one day his rigid pose and cocked head changed in a moment into that familiar black and white blur of speed we had so often seen before. But this time it ended with one huge leap right into our arms! He *was* loved. He *was* accepted. He *was* safe. He had at last taken us at our word. And in the months which followed, little "Hurry" entered into all the rights and privileges befitting a member of our family. He was at last truly free to fulfill his destiny.

You have accepted God's gifts (His food and His water), but have you yet believed that you *by nature* actually belong in His family? Far less than a "stray," you were spiritually dead, but now you are alive with the life of God. On the authority of God's own word, you are indeed free to enter into all the rights and privileges befitting a member of His family!