

Fanning it into Flame
Sunday, February 13, 2011
Living as a Son

In Matthew 9:16-17 Jesus responds to his disciples' question regarding fasting with the need to have new wineskins for new wine. If new wine was poured into old wineskins it would make them burst and both the wineskin and the wine would be lost. I believe he was speaking about the need to understand the truth through the new covenant of his grace. Thinking through the old wineskin of the old covenant, which was based upon our striving to keep the law, would not be able to handle the truth of what Jesus was now bringing.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians confronts them for their being knocked off course and aligning themselves with keeping the Law for their justification. They were being taught by the Judaisers that unless they kept the letter of the Law they were missing the mark. Paul asked them some questions in chapter 3 verses 2-6: ² *I would like to learn just one thing from you: **Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?*** ³ *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?* ⁴ *Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing?* ⁵ **Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?**(emphasis mine) The obvious answer was that it was their faith not the self-effort of keeping the law.

He goes on to say that the law was given to lead us to Christ so we could have a full revelation of our rights as children of God. **Galatians 4:4-5** ⁴ *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,* ⁵ *to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.* Many of us have grown up with the idea that God is looking for us to try as hard as we can to live a good life so we can become acceptable to him. This is wrong thinking! God gave his son to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Our faith in Christ's finished work on the cross alone makes us acceptable to him. We become a new creation in Christ. We are no longer under that old system of trying our best. We are a brand new species. We are alive in Christ. He is our life. We become children of God and are viewed through our union to Christ. God does not count our sins against us because we are now his sons, justified by what Christ has done alone.

Jesus said in John 14:15 (NAS) *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* The way many people read this is through the old wineskin of an old covenant mentality. They see it as our keeping the commandments shows our love for God, so we have to make every effort to keep them so God will see that we love him. The problem here is the subtle difference that can make you or break you. If you put the emphasis on the commands and try to keep them you are relying on self. I believe the right way of looking at this is to focus on the love of God. By reading this verse with the emphatic inflections on *love* and *will*, the result will be our ability to keep his commandments are directly related to our intimate relationship with him. It is a byproduct of his love. You may think I'm splitting hairs here, but the truth is that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. It is by grace that we are saved through faith and not of works or our own effort.

Rather than trying to make deals with God or promising him that you'll do better tomorrow, rest in the fact that we are already accepted by him ***in the beloved***, that is, in Christ. Meditating on this position of favor and our sonship really brings into focus the reality of who we are. As a result, with the Apostle Paul we can say that we can do all things through him who gives us strength. Give yourself this litmus test: when you fall into sin how do you process getting right with God? He tells us to confess our sins and he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Do you meditate on what Christ has done for you and thank him or do you focus on yourself and what you need to do to get right with him? Some fear this kind of talk thinking it opens the door to a license to sin. That is not the case. It keeps our focus on our love relationship with God through Christ our Lord and our utter dependence on what he has done and continues to do in and through us.