

Grace in Discipline

Chapter 1

Contrasts

Jamie stood sullenly beside the Head Teacher's door; his face black as thunder; his school tie askew; his shirt hanging out. He was in trouble again, and he knew it. He had just been forcibly ejected from Mr Taylor's maths lesson for yet again refusing to cooperate with the maths teacher's instructions. Jamie's stubbornness had escalated from an argument with the whole class as audience, to a 'full-on' rebellion when he had lost it, swearing, and shouting at the teacher.

The heels of Mrs Jones, Head teacher, tapped out a menacing staccato as she strode purposefully up the corridor towards Jamie.

Scenario 1

Jamie saw with a quick glance from under his eyebrows that she was red in the face and angry. He was in for it now! He kept his head down focusing on the linoleum floor "You again!" she shouted as she drew near, "What have you done this time?"

Jamie could feel her frustration hitting him like a wave. He gritted his teeth and kept quiet, refusing to look up.

"Get in there!" she snapped, flinging the door open so hard it slammed against the filing cabinet.

"Now," she panted, confronting him, "you speak to me this instant – do you hear? What have you done?"

Without looking up he handed her the report slip from Mr Taylor.

"So," she continued, scanning it quickly "you've been rude to Mr Taylor and not done your homework?"

"Ugh," he grunted. "But it was too hard, anyway, there was trouble at home."

"Excuses, excuses," she cut in sarcastically, "always excuses. Look at me when I'm talking to you!"

He raised his eyes reluctantly, choosing to gaze over her shoulder defiantly before dropping them again. Boy! Her face was red!

"And you swore at your teacher! I won't have it, do you hear, I won't have it!" Her last phrase ended in a shriek.

"You're no good, Jamie Dunston – you've been trouble since day one, you're lazy and rude. Mr Taylor is a good maths teacher."

Her words stung him into action. He shouted "He hates me, he's always down on me – he pushed me out – I'm reporting him. I've told you; it wasn't my fault. How many more times? There was trouble at home! And I hate you too!"

"That's enough" she snapped, "you are now on suspension; the next time it will be expulsion. Go to the lobby – I'm ringing your parents to pick you up."

"Good!" he shouted, "expel me. I can't wait to get out of here!"

He stormed out of the room muttering under his breath, “You old cow!”

Scenario 2

Jamie glanced up quickly and saw that she was looking very displeased. He was in for it now; he kept his head down focusing on the linoleum floor.

“Jamie – go in,” she said calmly, opening her door. “Now sit down,” easing herself into her swivel chair.

“What’s the trouble? You seem to be outside my door too often.” Her voice was friendly, which surprised him, and her tone was patient and concerned. He handed her the report slip.

“It’s Mr Taylor, he hates me,” he muttered his eyes down and refusing to meet her gaze.

“Jamie, look at me,” she said gently. He looked up unwilling and saw, to his surprise, that she didn’t look angry.

“What happened?”

“I’m no good at maths. Mr Taylor only likes the bright ones.”

“It says here you didn’t do your homework. Why was that?” she asked, not commenting on his accusation.

“He wouldn’t understand,” grunted Jamie, “Me mum and her partner Jo had a row and when I stood up for me mum he shouted at me – he’s not my dad, so we had a punch-up.”

“So, the homework never got a look in,” she inserted, “That’s understandable. But it says here you swore at Mr Taylor – is that true?”

“Yes,” he admitted, “I lost my rag and then he sent me out.”

“Jamie, let’s unpack this. First of all, you say that Mr Taylor hates you and favours the bright ones.”

“Yes – it’s true,” he said defensively.

“Alright we will have a talk together with Mr Taylor at lunchtime. Now,” she continued, “let’s tackle the homework issue. I understand with the trouble at home you couldn’t get it done. I’m sorry you had such an upset.” She added.

Jamie was surprised she understood! He was calming down now.

“But what should you have done?”

“I should have got a note from me mum explaining it,” he admitted.

“That’s right,” she said, “now let’s discuss your response to Mr Taylor – what do you think about that?”

“I shouldn’t have sworn at him and lost me rag,” he admitted slowly, “but,” excusing himself, “he doesn’t like me anyway so I don’t like him.”

“OK Jamie, but we are going to talk this out with him. Now go tidy yourself up and go the library for the last quarter of an hour before lunch when we’ll meet with Mr Taylor.”

Jamie grunted a ‘thank you’ and went off.

They met together. Mr Taylor, like Miss Jones, was calm and heard out Jamie's explanation without comment. Afterwards he said, "I'm sorry things are so bad at home Jamie, but you should have explained to me."

"You wouldn't have understood – you only like the bright ones anyway."

"You should have tried me," said Mr Taylor, "and it's not true Jamie, that I only like the bright ones. I want to help you and others who struggle but you must ask for help – you never ask. I'm for you Jamie," he stressed leaning forward. Jamie met his earnest gaze and was rocked – it seemed like he meant it.

"Now Jamie," said Miss Jones, "Do you think an apology is in order? You were very rude to Mr Taylor."

"Yes," he admitted. "I'm sorry Mr Taylor. But I don't like maths!"

"I forgive you, let's put it behind us. I know you find it hard, but we have to work together and if you'll admit it when you need help we could make progress. You may be surprised." He smiled.

Jamie was beginning to feel better – perhaps Mr Taylor wasn't so bad after all.

"Now Jamie," said Miss Jones, "the whole class heard and witnessed your rudeness. What do you think you should do?"

"I could apologise to Mr Taylor in front of 'em, I suppose." He answered soberly.

"Yes, I think that's only right – and what about the homework?" she added.

She wasn't letting him off the hook Jamie thought, but he couldn't help respecting her fairness and her steady, calm approach.

"If Mr T can explain it I'll have a go at it tonight," he replied.

"Good," said Miss Jones and Mr Taylor together, smiling at this stereo approach.

"By our normal standards I should suspend you Jamie as this is a serious breach of conduct and it's not the first time. But, because of the difficulties you're going through at home, I'm going to give you another chance."

"Thank you!" he gasped in surprise.

"Jamie, if you want help with the situation at home we can arrange for you to talk it through with a counsellor."

"Thanks," he answered, surprised, "I'll think about it."

"Once you've put things right with the class and tackled the homework we'll put this behind us Jamie," she said, meeting his gaze, "you are more important than the work. We're for you and God is for you and if you'll co-operate with us we can really go places."

She really means it, he thought.

"Now Jamie," she continued, "we are going to pray that God will help you change and for the situation at home. Will you join us?"

"OK," he agreed, "it might help!" he added.

"I think it will," said Mr Taylor, "God is your father, Jamie, and is for you even when you're not yet sure of him."

They began by thanking God that he knew Jamie and loved him, also having a plan for his life. They spoke out their forgiveness for Jamie and prayed for the restitution he needed to make. They prayed for Jamie's home situation and for God to help him with maths. He was surprised by all of this, but certainly felt better when they had finished.

"Thanks, Miss Jones, thanks. Thanks Mr Taylor. I'll give it a go." he said with relief.

"You're dismissed – get some lunch." she said opening the door. He went out feeling so differently to how he had come in. He felt as light as air!

Why the difference?

What is the reason for the different approaches to these two scenarios? And how is it in the first, a rebellious Jamie is confirmed in that rebellion and all relationships fragmented, whilst in the second the issues are resolved, and relationships actually strengthened?

The difference is that the second is based on biblical principles which are redemptive, bringing about reconciliation and restitution. The first, however, is non-relational and attempts to deal with anger by meeting it with anger. Each person is speaking only out of their own strength and emotion: the result – disintegration.

What is the reason for the difference between the two head teachers? Is it just that the second was a kinder person with better child-management skills? No, these two stories are both based on a theological foundation of two different covenants. In scenario one the Head teacher is dealing with Jamie on the basis of what is called a covenant of works whereby Jamie has broken the rules and must face a legal type of penalty. In the second the head teacher is operating from the covenant of grace which is based on redemptive relationship.

In the next chapter we will unpack these two covenants, drawing principles from God's relationship with his son and daughter, Adam and Eve.

Chapter 2

The Trinity, Adam and Eve

The link between a relational approach to disciplining Jamie and the theology of Covenant is not accidental. The covenant of grace is essentially relational. In exploring this we must begin with the biblical revelation that God is one God but three persons. Each person is distinct in himself and so it is possible for the Trinity to enjoy real fellowship with one another. Indeed, this accounts for much of the joy, satisfaction and delight that was in the Godhead. As three persons in relationship each can know the others' perfections perfectly and delight in this knowledge. As persons they can love each other infinitely. They can co-operate as persons and find satisfaction in their work together. Their fellowship together is therefore one of perfect relationship and immense joy.

This enjoyment of one another led the Godhead to decide to extend the blessing of relationship to those they had created. The man and woman were created with the capacity to experience the enjoyment of sharing in the relational life of the Trinity, for they were created as persons. The relational life of the Trinity would be the model for Adam and Eve's relationship with each other. Knowledge of each other would lead to increasing love. Loving co-operation in serving God would bring immense joy to them as they shared in God's joy, even as he co-operated with them.

A Covenant of Blessing

God's way of extending this relational life was through first creating Adam and Eve in his image and then making a covenant with them. The covenant was his way of making a promise to them that they could rely on God to keep. This promise was the icing on the cake of the incredible generosity God had already shown to them by creating them, giving them life, and setting them in perfect surrounding with everything they could desire. He had made them rulers on earth and given them a personal relationship with God. Adam and Eve knew each person of the Trinity and had a revelation of God that we can only imagine. If the Apostle John says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him." (1 John 4:16), we can be sure Adam and Eve knew this.

The covenant promise came on top of all these blessings and offered them eternal life through the tree of life. Thus, their enjoyment of God and their experience of the fellowship within the Trinity would be guaranteed forever. Their relationship with each other would eternally reflect the fellowship within the Trinity.

This covenant had only one condition. They were to express their loyalty to God and their obedience to a single command. Although they were free to enjoy the fruit from an abundance of plants in the garden they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God's covenant included this sanction for their disloyalty and disobedience – they would "die". Among other things this meant that they would lose the fellowship with God that they had enjoyed. The Lord Jesus alluded to this when he said in John 17:3 "This is eternal life: that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent." He had been sent to restore to people eternal life and this life was inseparable from knowing the persons of the Trinity – Father, Son, and as he makes sure in John 15:26, the Holy Spirit.

A Loss of Blessing

The consequences of Adam and Eve disobedience displayed the most serious sanction of the covenant. They lost the knowledge of the Trinity they had enjoyed and there was relational breakdown between them and God and between one another. When God came to fellowship with them they are “hiding”, “ashamed” and try to pass on blame for the disaster to others.

As we look at these specifically we shall see aspects of Jamie’s behaviour demonstrated and explained. First we will summarise the responses of Adam and Eve in their sin. Then we will go through their encounter with God to see the revelation of his gracious dealing with them.

From Adam and Eve’s perspective the following are their reactions:

Hiding – this showed how they had lost the revelation of God they had enjoyed up to this point. Instead of running to him they ran away. A guilty fear had entered into their relationship with God and made them preoccupied with themselves instead of him. They lost an understanding of his perfect knowledge of them and of any concept of his grace. Seeking forgiveness did not enter their heads, only escape! Jamie, like all of Adam’s descendants inherited this perversion of how to see God. His whole attitude and body language indicated that he wanted to hide from being accountable for his sin and instead of seeking forgiveness was running away.

Ashamed – they had been naked before but now gave this as a reason to hide and cover themselves. This is because a consequence of breaking the covenant was shame. This is an unwillingness to be seen as we really are and an attempt to project an image. Jamie’s shame is evident in the story as he tried to cover his own sin as projecting himself as the victim of the teacher rather than as the one who had done wrong.

Passing on blame – Adam blamed the woman. The woman blamed the serpent. No-one was willing to accept responsibility. This is another consequence of the human behaviour under the covenant of works. Minimising our blame by accusing others – even God. Jamie blamed his mother’s partner, the maths teacher – but not himself.

When we see these characteristics in ourselves and others we are observing features of the broken covenant of works in fallen humanity. But, most important of all we are seeing the loss of a revelation of God as the God of all grace. A righteous God, an angry God, a just God, a judging God – these we can accept, and the result is a desire to run and hide from him. But we cannot “see” a God of grace and mercy to whom we can run and be honest and real. We inherit this blindness from Adam, and it destroys the true and joyful fellowship with the Trinity.

A God of Grace

In reality the Genesis account reveals God’s abounding grace for those who have eyes to see it. When God comes into the garden after their fall into temptation he knows, through his omniscience, all that has taken place. Nevertheless, he seeks Adam and Eve out because he is still totally committed to their relationship, by which he intends to extend all the blessings of a relationship with such a loving God.

As he walks through the garden, Adam and Eve hide as we have seen. For the first time ever, they do not eagerly respond but hide in their guilt and shame even as Jamie “hid” with his eyes averted because sin had broken relationship. “They at once tried to justify themselves by attempting to hide their shame. This showed almost at once that

the spirit of the serpent had not only entered into but had begun to work in the human mind. They began to deceive, first by trying to cover themselves and then by hiding in the garden.¹

When God calls, “Where are you?” it is not because he doesn’t know! But he must call first Adam, then Eve to account in order to follow through the sanctions of the covenant before hope can be restored. Adam’s answer “I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid,” leads to God’s next question.

“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?” (v.11) Notice, the grace of God in requiring the man to answer and “own up” – yet not accusing him, although God knew every detail of his guilt.

Adam’s answer is breathtaking in its effrontery.

“The woman you (*my*) put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” (v.12) Within this one answer is encapsulated the nature of sin; the refusal to take responsibility; the displacement of guilt by blaming another; even as in our scenario Jamie blamed his teacher. In this case, Adam even dares to insinuate blame to God for creating the woman in the first place!

Once again Father God responds with restraint. He does not answer but turns to the woman that Adam has blamed.

Then God says to the woman, “what is this you have done?” (v.13)

Called to account, Eve also displaces guilt and yet her answer carries more truth than Adam’s. She recognises she has been deceived. “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” (v.13)

Without reacting, God turns to the serpent and finally make his wise and perfect judgement, cursing the serpent, condemning it to crawl on its belly and eat dust (presumably it was blessed prior to this with more preferable modes of motion and food). Enmity is now proclaimed between people and the serpent.

Further sanctions follow, for God must be true to his covenant promise of Genesis 2:17 which carried the warning of the penalty of death for disobedience.

For Eve, childbearing will still be possible but with more pain; whereas we may presume it should have been a blissful experience. A conflict through their yielding to Satan, will now enter their relationship – a conflict of both desire by Eve for Adam, but his rule of her, which instead of gracious headship, will now be marred by sin and produce frustration and rejection.

For Adam, the penalty of death applicable to both is preceded by the promise of agricultural works now becoming a “painful toil” against briars and thorns, whereas before now we presume it had been pleasurable and the earth had been easily productive.

“By the sweat of your brow you will tend to the ground since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (v.19)

¹ From “Theological studies in Genesis and Romans” by William Still pp.32

Blessings in the midst of judgement

Subsequently, and surprisingly, blessings follow as God deals with his recalcitrant and rebellious children. Their nakedness is literally covered by the first clothes of animal skin. This means that the first blood was shed; the first animal was killed; the first sacrifice was made; to cover the sin and shame of Adam and Eve.

Secondly, God's kindness is further demonstrated in his banishment of them both from the garden of Eden.

"Surely," you may say, "this is God's punishment – he is angry with them and, in effect says, 'out you go'". Not so, the banishment is God's greatest kindness because it saves them from the dire consequence of eating of the tree of eternal life and living forever in their sin. God says of Adam, "he must not be allowed to reach out with his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever." (v.22) An added blessing will be the restoration of Adam and Eve's revelation of the grace of the Trinity, which they had lost.

A Glorious Hope

Yet in the midst of this whole tragic confrontation comes the most gracious promise of all; a new covenant which will undo these grievous consequences of sin. Speaking to the serpent, God articulates a future hope; "and I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel." (v.15)

Here is nothing less than the gracious promise that a future saviour (Jesus Christ) will come to destroy Satan's rule even though Christ will be attacked, as he surely was, through the inspiration of evil men, and put to the cross. Yet this was all the purpose of a sovereign and loving God. Note that this promise to Adam of a deliverer carries no conditions at all; no requirements are made of Adam and Eve. It is God himself who will fulfil all the conditions in order to restore the man and woman to loving relationship; a fellowship with him whereby he can fully bless them. All these benefits will be a consequence, not of Adam and Eve's obedience, for none was required of them or their descendants, but simply by faith as they believe the promise. This lays the foundation of the future covenant of grace.

In conclusion, we can see that in every word and action in this account God is full of both grace and truth. His righteousness is upheld by the penalty and consequence of the breaking of the covenant of works. His grace is evident in his grace and kindness when they deserved the opposite, clothing them and saving them from a life of eternal sin. The covenant of works was made with an innocent Adam and Eve, but the covenant of grace is made with a rebel son and daughter. The greatest blessing of all is the promise of future deliverance. How amazing is God's grace, how great is God's desire to restore relationship!

The treatment of Jamie in our second scenario results from exactly this sound theological foundation of grace. Jamie is not accused but brought to account, he is listened to, and helped to face his wrong behaviour. Throughout, he is dealt with in an atmosphere of patience and understanding, with a complete absence of anger on the part of those in authority. Such grace, coming through people by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is compassionate and yet righteous. Sin is dealt with, consequences follow, restitution is made, and hope extended. Most important of all, relationship, severed by sin, is restored and a future hope is offered.

Chapter 3

The Two Streams

The story of the Bible flows between these two covenants of works and grace until we reach the coming of the Son who would reverse the disasters of the Fall. The covenant of grace comes to the clearest expression in his victory over the deceiver through death and his resurrection. “This is the new covenant in my blood,” Jesus had said.

Genesis 3:3-15 was to Adam as Mount Pisgah was to Moses.

From this height Moses could view the whole land of Canaan that the Israelites were to inherit. So, Adam and Eve could view the whole of human history to come looking for the fulfilment of this promise of the Son who would crush the serpent who had deceived them.

Cain and Abel

The two contradictory covenants are demonstrated in the tragic story of Cain and Abel. Cain related to God under a covenant of works believing that if he did his part in worshipping God, then God would do his part in blessing Cain. In other words, Cain could do a deal with God and by bringing God an offering of his work he believed that God would respond with blessing. Although Cain did not worship a physical idol he was an idolator because he worshipped a false image of God. When God is worshipped under a covenant of works there is always a distortion of the truth about him. This covenant assumes that if I do my part, God will do his part. It is a bargaining relationship and underlines all the idolatry that was to emerge in the Old Testament and dogged Israel for generation after generation.

Now, grace is God’s loving response to those who deserve *the opposite*. This was how God dealt with Adam in Genesis 3 and supremely in the promise of Genesis 3:15. This is what Jamie encountered in the second scenario. It is the motivation behind Abel’s offering. Abel is commended in Hebrews 11 as a man of faith. Men of faith are those whose faith is “the evidence of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen”. Abel could not “see” the fulfilment of Genesis 3:15 with his eyes, but he saw it with the eye of faith, and believed. To believe this promise he had to believe that God would deal with him on the basis of grace i.e., treat him as if he deserved such a deliverer to come. He knew that under the covenant of works he deserved to die for his own sin. But he understood that part of God’s promise of deliverance and restoration was the provision of a substitute to die in his place. Thus, he came with a blood sacrifice, recognising that there could be no deals with God, only an acknowledgement of God’s grace and mercy in sparing the sinner and punishing another in his place.

The contradictory nature of the two covenants is starkly expressed in Cain’s hostility towards Abel. This outworks itself in human history when religion (even Christian religion) is seen as a covenant of works and persecutes those who live in the covenant of grace.

Through Cain’s line the covenant of works spread. God gave Adam a third son, Seth. His line seems to have worshipped God in the covenant of grace, believing and passing of the promise of Genesis 3:15 for his dependants to believe (ensuring that this was passed on until Moses wrote it down). However, when his descendants intermarried with Cain’s, the covenant of grace was obscured, and idolatry prevailed until only Noah and his family remained as a “seed” of what was to come. Noah was

not spared because he deserved to be saved, but because he believed the promise. He became a type of salvation that was to come through the Son, and the ark itself was a symbol of mercy in the midst of judgement.

Abraham meets the God of Grace

Abraham was called from the moon-worshipping community of Ur by a God he could not see. He is promised innumerable descendants who will inherit the earth. God is offering to treat him as if he deserved the greatest of blessings God could give – but Abraham was a sinner! (Romans 4:16). To believe the promise, Abraham had to believe that God was dealing with him in grace – the opposite of what he deserved. This meant believing and worshipping him as a God of grace. Abraham did so and became the “Father” of all who would enter the covenant of grace as he did.

Abraham was given a deeper insight into what the covenant of Genesis 3:15 meant when he prepared to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah. “God will provide the sacrifice” by his grace was what Adam and Seth had seen in their day, but Abraham was given a clearer view. Abraham’s descendants were oppressed in Egypt, had turned to idols and forsaken God’s covenant of grace, in their misery they cried out and God heard them; not because they deserved to be heard and delivered, but because of God’s covenant with Abraham – a covenant of grace. He dealt with them according to the opposite of what they deserved and delivered them from Egypt. In doing so, he added further revelation to the promise of Genesis 3:15 – the Passover Lamb was substituted for the first born of the Israelites. Judgement fell on Egyptians who worshipped according to a covenant of works. Their worship was based on determining what the idol expected of them in order to bless their crops, herds, homes, and nation. They had perfected the bargaining position to a fine art with elaborate rituals and priests. But now their gods had not been able to withstand the God of Abraham and when the judgement fell only those who were under the shelter of the sacrificed lambs’ blood were saved.

Moses and Sinai

When God introduced himself to Moses in the wilderness he gave himself the name YHWH. He said that he had not been known by this name until this point (although Moses would write the name into the narrative of Genesis). In our Bible the name YHWH is substituted by LORD. In Hebrew this was the word for Adonai, meaning Lord. Because the Jews considered YHWH too holy to pronounce, they used Adonai (Lord) when they came to it in the text. Our bibles print this in capitals to show where the name YHWH was originally written. The importance of this is appreciating that the covenant of grace is crucial. God revealed this as his name in the context of delivering a sinful and idolatrous people from Egypt. In other words, he was revealing himself as the God who was making a covenant of grace with Israel. When we read the word LORD we must always read with it the revelation of the God of this covenant. The God who deals with me according to the opposite of what I deserve.

At Sinai God met with the people and specifically established a covenant with them. When we read this covenant in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy it might appear that it is actually a covenant of works. One summary of it is “do this and you will live.” To those who are blind to the grace of God, it would be treated as a covenant of works which had been exclusively given to the Jews. This occurred, not only in the Old Testament period, but was supremely expressed in the Phariseism that opposed and persecuted Jesus and of which Saul of Tarsus was a supreme example.

However, the covenant of Sinai was intended as a covenant of grace. It made promises and gave commands, but underlying all this was the ritual of the tabernacle with the regular sacrifices. These spoke of a God of grace and mercy who would deal with people in the opposite way to that which they deserved. The “old covenant” made in Sinai was really a covenant of grace, and in it we see the truth of Genesis 3:15 illustrated in signs and symbols.

The story of the Israelites demonstrates that when people have no revelation of the God of grace and engage with the covenant of grace they turned it into a covenant of works. We know that behind this is more than human perversity. This is Satanic and demonic work. When Paul encountered this in the new churches he was ruthless in exposing and challenging it.

Cain kills Abel again

John tells us that “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17) The grace and truth of God lay behind the giving of the law, but people were so blind that they could only see a means of bargaining with God by using the law to keep on the right side of God. So, God sent his son so that grace and truth could be visibly seen (and read about in the 21st Century). John writes that Jesus was “full of grace and truth” and “from the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another”. What was the response of the religious Jews to Jesus’ grace and truth? “Crucify him!” Cain kills Abel once again. Our Bible is divided into an Old Testament and a New Testament. The editors who gave it these divisions gathered that there were two covenants (or testaments). There is sometimes confusion about this because the old covenant is confused with the covenant of works and the new covenant with the covenant of grace. The old covenant is, in fact, the covenant of Sinai – a covenant of grace that is turned into a covenant of works. The new covenant is the final and fullest expression of the covenant of grace in the person of Jesus. Both of these are the fulfilment of Genesis 3:15.

When Paul writes about being “under the law” in Romans, he means living by the law of God *as if it was a covenant of works*. It means embracing God’s laws without being embraced by the God of grace. This is fatal to knowing and fellowshiping with the Trinity for it leads to all the consequences we covered in Chapter two. It uses what is good (the law) to produce something evil (death).

Since this is such a crucial matter we must look more closely at what the covenant of grace really is if we are to avoid the trap of turning it into a covenant of works.

Chapter 4

Understanding the Biblical Covenants of Grace and Works

Imagine yourself walking the streets of London viewing its sights, such as the Tower of London, Buckingham Palace, Kensington Garden, the London Eye, the Royal Observatory, Wimbledon. Each of these sights is located in a specific district or borough of London but you could view the sights and be unaware of the borough, although you are in it. All the while you walked in the streets and were impressed by each individual sight, you were in the city of London. But if you were to write a postcard to a friend telling them all the sights you had seen, you might not even mention you were in London. You would expect them to know that!

The place of covenant in scripture is something like this. We are familiar with the important “sights” of our faith – the Lord’s Supper, Baptism, Prayer, Scripture, Fellowship and Church. We can know the details of these and practise them, but yet be unaware that, in each case, the bible presumes that these are all covenantal. They are individual “sights” in a city of covenant. Just because covenant is not always mentioned in connection with every teaching of scripture it does not mean it is not there. Each location in London is still in London, whether that is specifically stated or not!

When we consider what the bible says about training of children, we can be aware of specific approaches and techniques, but yet forget that *everything* that is taught in scripture is in the context of covenant. We’ve already used the example of the book of Proverbs to demonstrate that everything taught in the book is within the context of the fear, not of God, but the God of covenantal grace, the LORD.

What is Covenant?

Although the bible is divided into two testimonial covenants, we can know the name of every book and not even be aware of what is meant by old covenant and new covenant. This chapter is an attempt to explain the meaning of covenants for the people of God.

We begin by looking at the term *covenant*. This is an agreement that could be made between people in which:

- a. each party was equal and had equal obligations.
- b. the parties were unequal, and the obligations were unequal

An example of the first kind is the covenants made between people in the bible, for example, Abraham and Abimelech or Ruth and Naomi. It is found today in marriage covenants, or the covenant involved in a house purchase.

The second kind of covenant appears in scripture when a king or emperor performs some failing action on behalf of a needy people, and as a consequence, establishes a covenant promising to be king for them and fight for them while imposing on them obligations of loyalty.

It is the second kind of covenant that characterises the covenant of God with humans. The essence of covenant is summed up by the phrase “I will be your God and you will be my people.” The order here is important. In the covenant God makes it is her that takes the initiative, not man. He *makes them* his people.

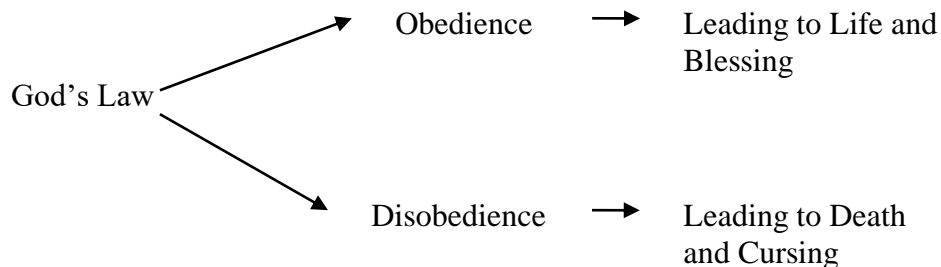
Covenants are All Covenants of Grace

Following the Reformation of the 16th Century, and the return to scripture as the foundation for the teaching of the church, scholars began to discover again that God relates to people through a covenant. The covenants with Noah, Abraham and David became models in which the feature of God's covenant-making could be seen. In addition, the relationship with Israel was also specifically stated as a covenant and the Old Testament prophets looked ahead to the new covenant inaugurated in the Messiah.

This led to an appreciation of the covenantal nature of God's promises to Adam and Eve and the nature of the obligations imposed on them. This is not specifically stated as a covenant but undoubtedly is in the form of one.

The covenant came to be called the Covenant of Works because the promise was conditional on Adam and Eve's obedience to God's commands. It depended on their works. Other names were also given to this Covenant, but the best known is that of Works and we have used it in this book.

The Covenant of Works was indeed a gracious act of God. He was under no obligation to make the promise of eternal life to Adam and Eve. They had no claim on him. Yet God promised life and blessing for obedience to him. The covenant also has sanctions for disobedience – death and cursing. This diagram illustrates the covenantal arrangement:



God bound himself to do what he had promised if they did what was required. Although life and blessing was a gift of God, they would deserve to receive it only if they obeyed. As Paul says in Romans 4:4 “When a man works his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation”. God, in his grace, placed himself under an obligation to give life and blessing to humanity's first parents if they “worked” or “obeyed”.

A Covenant of Works Bargains with God

As we have seen the covenant was broken by Adam and the sanctions were applied. The rest of his descendants were to be condemned to live under this Covenant of Works, and throughout history it was elaborated in various ways to try to establish a bargaining relationship with God, or gods. What does the small god want us to do to give us her or his blessing? We will do this to ensure that we are protected from evil by our god and receive its favour and benefit. All religions, from idol worship to Islam, offer this kind of covenant relationship with god. The gods may differ, but the arrangement is the same. If I do my bit, my god will do his bit. This kind of thinking can be seen in the way the Christian faith has been perverted throughout the centuries.

It becomes a means of getting on the right side of the God of the Bible. This is a better way of living under a covenant of works.

The First Preaching of the Gospel

God's response to Adam's sin was one of grace although he had to apply the sanctions to the letter. He not only dealt graciously with Adam and Eve in confronting them, but he announced another covenant in Genesis 3:15. This was the promise of a man to come who would deliver Adam's descendants from the curse brought upon them by Satan's coming. In crushing the serpent, he would restore man's role as ruler over creation. However, he would do so at a personal cost –his "heel" would be bruised.

This new promise was not linked to obligations on Adam's part. All Adam could do was believe and receive it – or not do so. If he believed he would be entering into a new covenant and would be stepping out of the covenant of works and benefit from the promise. If he did not, he would remain under the Covenant of Works. This is why Genesis 3:15 is seen as *the first preaching of the Gospel*. This was good news indeed for people condemned to live under the Covenant of Works. The sacrifice of the animal needed to cover Adam and Eve indicated that the blessing of the promise would require life to be forfeited. This is the truth that Abel perceived but to which Cain was blind.

This has been called the Covenant of Grace because:

- a. It was made with rebels and sinners. i.e., people who deserved the opposite.
- b. It was not linked to obligations on the part of people, otherwise it would only be another covenant of works and would be broken again.
- c. God was guaranteeing the benefits of the covenant by obligating himself to fulfil it "I will.... He shall...."
- d. There were no sanctions associated with the promise.

This is why we are not content to define God's grace as his love to those who do not deserve it. It is God's love to those who deserve the opposite! To qualify for grace, you must deserve judgement.

Accepting the Covenant Brings Justification

It was this covenant in its different guises that Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David trusted in. It was a covenant that "justified" because the promise was God's offer to treat the believer as if he or she was completely righteous and had kept every law even though they had not! This is Paul's argument in Romans 4 concerning Abraham. God promised him innumerable descendants and "the world" based on grace. He gave Abraham a promise *as if* Abraham was perfectly righteous when he was a sinner. Abraham received God's gracious promise, and in doing so accepted God's covenant of grace with him – to deal with him according to the opposite of what he deserved. It was not Abraham's faith that justified him, but God's offer of grace to treat him as righteous when he was not. He accepted this justification as a gift. Paul argues that this was *always* God's way of saving people. The Law never saved anyone, certainly not Abraham (Romans 3:20).

This justification could not be offered by God simply out of his good will, Paul makes this clear in Romans 3:25-26: *God must justify sinners justly*. But this could never be done under the Covenant of Works.

So, the Covenant of Grace was offered in the expectation that God would find a righteous way to release people from the Covenant of Works by a means other than their own death! *The wage of death had to be paid* by every descendant of Adam. The reason all people die is theological, not merely medical.

God's Son Tastes Death

God's plan was fulfilled when he sent his own Son as a man: the *Last Adam* as Paul calls him. Paul gives him this title because as a man he put himself under the Covenant of Works, both the natural law of conscience and the biblical law of the Torah. He was the only man to be justified by works and thus he deserved the promise of life and the blessing – as a man.

Yet because he came as a man, it was possible for him to die. Having not broken the Covenant of Works, he was immune from death. But in God's plan, the Son of Man (Ben Adam in Hebrew) represented Adam's race under the Covenant of Works. As Adam's descendent he kept the covenant. However, on the cross he took the penalty of death and the curse as if he had utterly failed to obey. Thus, as a substitute he fulfilled *both* sides of the covenantal *equation* – he gained the reward of life through his obedience and took the penalty of death by representing us. He is called the *last* Adam because, having fulfilled both aspects of the covenant, he was finished with the Covenant of Works forever. He was raised from the dead because the father was obligated to raise him. This was the promise for anyone who fulfilled the Covenant of Works. But when he rose he was a man, yet no longer under the Covenant of Works! It was finished with. He was in fact the first man of a new humanity. That is why he is never called the second Adam but rather the *new* Man. Adam was the man under Works², the new man is under Grace.

A New Family

Paul's teaching in Romans 5:12f elaborates this truth. He shows this point of view, that, from God's point of view, humanity falls into two groups or families, each with a "head". The *first* family has Adam as its head, the *second* family has Christ as its head. God deals with the family through the representative head, a concept not familiar with Western people raised in individualistic societies. Those associated with Adam are in his family, and what is true for him is true for them. This is what it means to be "in Adam" i.e., in his humanity.

Adam is the man under Works. According to Paul he is under the reign of sin (v21); he is under the reign of death (v14) and under the condemnation of the law (v16). All that is true of Adam is true for his descendants. Jesus came, fully identifying with Adam's race (born of a woman, born under the law) and on the cross stood under the reign of sin and death and the condemnation of the law. In dying he finished with all of these.

He rose as the head of a new family – sons of God, born of the Spirit and under Grace. In other words, they related to God not on the basis of their performance and obedience, but on his grace alone.

Christ's Obedience Gains Every Blessing

² To avoid repetition the use of capital letters indicates that Works is short for Covenant of Works and Grace is short for Covenant of Grace.

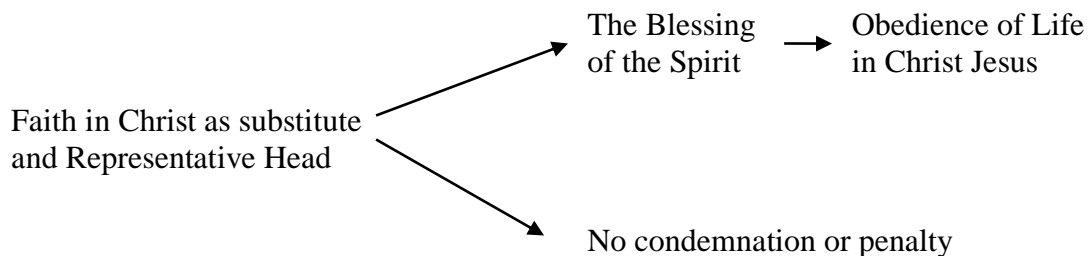
Now it is vital at this point to recognise that the Covenant of Grace was made with Christ as the representative head. All the obligations of the covenant are taken on by him and all the promises are fulfilled through him. This is why Paul says, “all the promises of God are ‘yes’ in him”. There is, therefore, no condemnation, for there is no law to condemn. He finished the law as a condition of the blessing. Our obedience does not obtain the promises because his obedience has already done so.

The two great blessings of the Covenant of Grace are:

- a. The complete removal of sin (Jeremiah 31:32-34)
- b. The writing of God’s law on human hearts (Jeremiah 31:33)

Paul makes it clear in 2 Corinthians 3 and Galatians 3:14 that the writing of the law on our hearts is the work of the Spirit, uniting us to the Son of God. This union with Christ enables us to produce “fruit for God”. (Romans 7:4-6) This “fruit” is actual obedience to God the Father - the Son imparting his love for, and obedience to, the Father to the members of his new humanity.

Thus, obedience is no longer the condition for life and blessing but rather the consequence of receiving life and blessing. Our diagram now looks like this.



All That is True of Christ is True of the Believer

Thus, the believing person, simply through his faith in Christ, is united to Christ and all that was true of Christ is true for him. He has died to the condemnation of the law, to the reign of sin (though not to its power) and to the reign of death. Indeed, Paul says that “those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the free gift of righteousness reign in life *through the one man*, Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:17) They reign now, just as Genesis 3:15 promised.

In addition to this the man who was once in Adam and under the rule of the evil one is now released and equipped to become a soldier of Christ fighting against Satan to release others from his kingdom.

The bargaining relationship with God has gone. We stand “in this grace” where God deals with us according to the opposite of what we deserve, and he will always do so.

The Prodigal Son

We have focussed a lot on what Paul says about works and grace. The Lord in Jesus illustrated it powerfully in the story known as The Prodigal Son. (Luke 15:11-32) The prodigal knows he has sinned “against heaven” and against his own father. He reasons that he will return, humble himself and offer to work for his father as a servant. This means entering into a bargaining relationship with the father. ‘If I do my part in working, the father will do his part in paying’. He rehearses his speech and delivers it, but the father will have none of it. He insists on treating his son according to the opposite of what he deserved. His son did not even deserve to be a servant, but the father went much further than this. He treated his son as if he had been the best son a father could ask to have! This is grace and the father insisted upon a relationship with the son based on grace. The son would have been content with the servant relationship based on works – so are many Christians.

However, the parable is just as much about the older brother. He had not “blown it” like the younger one. He had worked diligently for many years and never caused the father a problem. Yet he did not understand the father’s heart and the kind of relationship the father sought with his sons. He reacted to grace being shown to the younger brother saying, “he does not *deserve* this treatment, after what he has done.”

Then he protests he has served so well for many years and never got this sort of a party from the father. The father told him that everything had always been his for years *simply because he was his son* – not because he had worked hard. In other words, the older brother also related to his father on the basis of works! ‘I have done my bit, but you never did your bit.’ ‘I deserved a party like this.’ But grace knows nothing of this bargaining, servant-orientated position.

The prostitutes and sinners of Jesus’ day were received into the Covenant of Grace on the same basis as the religious Pharisee.

How Much is Work Engrained in Us

Perhaps we have seen in our reactions how deeply this principle of works is engrained in us. When someone is blessed by God whom we consider did not deserve it, how have we responded? Suppose their prayers are answered when ours remain unanswered, yet we have been serving the Lord more diligently than they have. “They don’t deserve that,” we think. But what is the other side of that: “we do deserve it!” But if you are seeking blessing from God, you can never receive it by anything you deserve. It cannot be grace then! In order for it to be grace you must deserve the opposite.

The Father’s grace towards us includes the blessing of discipline to train us for the inheritance to come. Hebrews 12, the classic passage on fatherly discipline and the Covenant of Grace makes it clear that discipline and grace are not contradictory. In fact, discipline is an expression of love. “My son do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?” (Hebrews 12:5-7)

Our Father’s discipline may involve various experiences including suffering, hardship, disappointment, or trouble. But in the Covenant of Grace, we must never interpret these as condemnation or punishment, or we play into Satan’s hands and fall back under the law to perform harder to get the Lord to change the circumstances. If

we are not clear on the difference between the two humanities we will interpret the Father's *correction* (which is a gift of grace) as *rejection* (which is condemnation under the law). We will also transmit this into our dealings with others in the community.

The Christian community consists of people who are part of the new humanity of Christ. They live under Grace where they deal with each other as God deals with them – according to the opposite of what others deserve. They don't live with the attitude to each other "if you do your part I'll do mine"; "if you're nice to me I'll be nice to you". This is how people under Works relate. No, in the covenant community we relate to God through his grace and to one another in grace.

Perhaps now we are ready to apply this theology of covenant to young people in the Christian community and to see how adults should relate to them in the Covenant of Grace.

Chapter 5

The Child in the Community of Grace (1)

In the next two chapters we examine three categories of children we will find in the Christian school community. Firstly, there is the child who is not born again and comes from a non-Christian family. This is portrayed in the story of Jamie in Chapter 1. Secondly, there is the child who is not born again and comes from a Christian family. Finally, there is the regenerate child who has a saving knowledge and faith in Jesus Christ and may come from a Christian or non-Christian family. In each case, we must recognise that biblical teaching shows us that the parents have a key role and the prime responsibility for training their children. We partner with them in sharing this responsibility. Each category of child will require a different approach from head and teachers who operate in a spirit of grace but need to know the constraints imposed by the different categories. The Head Teacher sets the atmosphere of God's grace in the school, but the teachers are responsible for understanding and implementing it by their commitment to values and practice in all their dealings with all their pupils, whichever category they are in.

Communities Need Laws

We must, however, be clear about one issue in any community. This is that every community requires "laws" of some kind – we cannot just drift around in what some have called 'greasy grace' and others have labelled 'sloppy agape'! For there are three prefaces for law in schools or any Christian community.

1. To restrain wrong behaviour, establishing peace. Hence, even in our wider society noisy neighbours disturbing others can be 'bound over to keep the peace'.
2. To convict of sin, revealing it in our hearts and leading us, in a Christian community, to see our need of a saviour, Jesus Christ.
3. To reveal God's wisdom and his ways for our lives.

In our experience as Head Teachers of Christian schools we have avoided lists of rules. Instead, we have a code of conduct and expectations, or principles which are pro-actively explained, giving reasons for their implementation. For example, in one of our schools students knew that they were not to run because there were 'blind' corners at the end of the corridors and to run would incur the risk of a nasty collision.

Covenant of Works or Grace?

In disciplining our children within the school community, we will have to apply some aspects of the Covenant of Works, involving some penalty and reward. Yet we want to do this in a spirit of grace – offering unconditional love even in confrontation and correction. There will be work to be done; there will be boundaries differentiating acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in our community. There will be some reward to encourage them in their efforts and growth towards maturity and character and in their work.

Category 1 – The child who is not born again and comes from a non-Christian family.

This child is, theologically speaking, not yet able to partake of the Covenant of Grace because he or she has not yet come into a relationship by faith with Jesus Christ and

ultimately the Trinity. Therefore, this child must be dealt with under Works, requiring him or her to recognise the necessary standards in the community. However, as we saw, with Jamie who was in this category, we need to understand that law of any kind actually provokes sin and at the same time is used by God to help us recognise sin. In his classic chapter 7 on this in the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul says: “Is the law sin? Certainly not? Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, ‘do not covet’” (Romans 7:7)

Jamie’s Sin

Jamie, an unsaved child from an unsaved family, is having to face the sin that rises up into rebellion within him against the “law” of the homework requirements. He must face the penalty of his accumulated behaviour which could, in his case, lead to suspension. In the first scenario, Jamie is dealt with legalistically without relationship and the anger with which he is treated mixes with the anger already in him to provide a combustible explosion where he storms off. His behaviour has been corrected in a measure, but his heart has not been won – in fact: the opposite. He is now confirmed in his hatred of Mrs Jones and Mr Taylor. He is also confirmed in the fact that their attitude to him is judgemental and condemning. This can only get worse; it is relational breakdown.

A Different Scenario

In scenario 2 we see how God wants us to handle our ‘Jamies’ (male or female). The Covenant of Works is applied but both Mrs Jones and Mr Taylor treat Jamie with grace, as shown by their patience and understanding. Anger on the part of authority will always provoke more anger and rebellion in the subject, but the opposite is also true. The Bible says, “a gentle answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1) Although Mr Taylor may have every right to be angry with Jamie (and he may indeed feel this, yet he chooses to be forgiving and understanding), Jamie is getting the opposite to what he deserves – this is grace. Although Mrs Jones has the authority to crack down on Jamie she handles this authority with wisdom and grace. She calls Jamie to face what he has done and requires the ‘penalty’ of apology and restitution. However, she demonstrates our need to listen to the Holy Spirit and gain understanding of Jamie’s predicament. Her main task, and this is the goal for all Christian educators, is to let two things happen. First, Jamie must face his sin and ultimately this should lead him to understand he cannot change and therefore, see his need of a Saviour. Again to quote Romans 7:18-20 “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”

The law thus becomes our ‘school master’, as Galatians 3:24 puts it, leading us to Christ and showing us the real and corrosive power of sin dwelling in us. Secondly, Jamie will be helped towards this step of faith, (although he is, as yet, in the early stages of his journey), by experiencing or ‘tasting’ the flavour of grace from God as it comes through Mrs Jones and Mr Taylor. This begins to win his heart, building a bridge-relationship to unconditional love, which will ultimately bring about change in him and lead him to see his need of Christ. He is already experiencing the love of God through his teachers.

Category 2: The unsaved child who is from a Christian family

What differences will there be for this child in the way we respond?

The goal of the teachers and parents is to help this child into the experience of Grace. Prayer will be vital here. There will be many similarities to the previous category. The main difference should be that the home is also a community where he or she experiences the flavour of grace. Obviously, no parent or family is perfect, neither is any school; but we do need to recognise this as our goal and to ask God to help us towards it.

No Osmosis!

For this child and parents too must face the fact that just because we are born into a Christian family it does not mean we will become a Christian by osmosis! This child must be helped to face their wilful sin passed onto them by the parents! The law will lead this child, hopefully more quickly than Jamie, to see their need of a saviour to rescue them from this bondage. Parents help them to face this in the home and teachers work in tandem with this same aim at school. Each child must make their own journey of revelation and we can trust the Holy Spirit to bring them to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and their need for release, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, from the burden of sin. They need to accept, in humility, that they cannot change themselves. They need him to do it for them by yielding to his Kingship. This process cannot be hurried but we can aid it by our response.

One Danger

One danger may be that the child will think that they can be successful by 'good behaviour' in a Covenant of Works. This is especially applicable to compliant children who may, through their personality, not push the boundaries. We need to pray for God to reveal their sinful nature to them so that they too can face it, recognise their need, and find the saviour. Parents also need to recognise the blindness that some of us experience prior to a revelation of God's Grace. This conveys the expectation (spoken or unspoken) that because they are a Christian family their children will somehow be better behaved. This blindness can effectively shield a child from facing the very truth about themselves that they need to face – that there is ugly sin lurking in their hearts, and it came from us, their parents!

Chapter 6

The Child in the Community of Grace (2)

Saved but still sinning!

Once a child has become regenerate and comes into Grace, what difference does this make to the application of law and discipline? The book of Proverbs is all about disciplining (discipling), and training children. But at the very beginning the book tells us that the goal of discipline is not merely behavioural control, but wisdom. This means the training of character. What is the beginning of wisdom? The fear of the LORD. Notice the capital letters. This means not merely the fear of God but a worshipful reverence for the God of the Covenant of Grace. It is the fear of *this* God that is the beginning of wisdom and the foundation of discipline. Indeed, a vital element in training and educating a Christian child is to help them understand the difference between living under the Covenant of Works and the covenant of Grace. They need to be taught that there is a world of difference between the two. They also need to be taught that Satan, the serpent of Eden and the deceiver of the world, has one supreme objective – to drive the believing child back to Works even when they have been ‘released from it into the grace of God in which we now stand.’ Romans 5:2.

The Revelation of the God of Grace

When a child has entered the Covenant of Grace, one of the blessings he or she enjoys is the gift of the Spirit to reveal that God is a God of grace and to reveal Christ who is full of grace and truth. The darkness in the unregenerate mind blinds the child to God as a God of grace. As the light of revelation flows in, 2 Corinthians 3 tells us the Spirit wants us to “contemplate the glory of the Lord” that changes us from one degree of glory to another. This is done, Paul says when “the veil is removed” from our minds. He goes on to say that it is the Spirit who removes this veil in a regenerate believer; but we do not go on trying to serve God according to the written code but in the new way of the Spirit. (Romans 7:6) The new covenant is not of the letter (i.e., written on stone or paper) but of the Spirit, “for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6). The application of this for the Christian child or teenager is critical to their development. The greatest danger to the regenerate child is not that he or she will go off the “deep end” into sin – which is what most Christian parents fear. It is that they will not discover that they have been *released* from the ministry that “condemns men” (2 Corinthians 3:9), “the ministry that bought death” (2 Corinthians 3:7) into the “ministry that brings righteousness” (2 Corinthians 3:9); this is the ministry of the Spirit.

Parents, teachers, and youth workers may rejoice when a child comes to faith and is born again. But if they do not adjust their view of the child as having passed into Grace they will continue to treat the child as if he is under Works. Worst of all the Christian child will try to work out his Christian life under Works even though he is born again. This is a disaster for the child! If a child’s behaviour and character is merely conforming to rules and expectations and commands then that child is being denied the privilege of Grace. Under that covenant he can only be changed from one degree of glory to another by “contemplating the glory of the Lord”, the God of Grace. “And this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18) Under Works, limited change is possible without the Spirit, but this is really a counterfeit

change in God's eyes. The older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son is such a case. In Grace genuine transformation takes place by the Spirit. Indeed, without the Spirit no change is possible under the New Covenant.

Educators Need to Understand Grace for Themselves

Christian adults who deal with young people must be convinced about this. However, a serious obstacle to being able to relate to a child who is now under Grace is that the adults dealing with the child do not understand the covenant themselves. Worse still, they may actually think that the Covenant of Works can do a good job! When Paul was faced with this in Romans 6 he responded, "God forbid!" that believers should remain under Works. Teachers may even be living under works themselves and be trying to teach and disciple young people in the same way of living.

The Satanic Strategy

Children who are "successful" in conforming under Works and are compliant and respectful may appear to develop as model Christians. But others may find the failure to succeed under this covenant too demanding and frustrating and to the amazement of their parents rebel and become lawless. How many parents have been stunned by a son or daughter who appeared to be developing well as a child and then suddenly went off the deep end kicking over the traces of their Christian background? The amazement of the parents is a measure of their own misunderstanding of Grace and Works. A believing child who continues to be raised as if under Works may be motivated to conform but may be driven away from Christ. Pressing such a child into the law, into rules and commands will push them further from Christ – the opposite of what parents' desire. This is a satanic strategy against Christian young people and its effectiveness cannot be overestimated. More Christian young people have lost their way through this than through outright sin.

It is essential for Christian parents and teachers to understand how to extend Grace to a believing child. It is just as important to understand how Satan works constantly to drive the parents, teachers, and child back under Works.

God is No Longer Judge but Father

The regenerate child is now under Grace. There is "now no condemnation" because he is "in Christ Jesus" and there is no law that condemns him. He can only be condemned in Adam who was "under the law", but now he has passed from the family of Adam with condemnation hanging over him and a guilty conscience accusing him. He is now "under Grace" where a loving Father deals with him according to the opposite of what he deserves. He now comes to a "throne of grace" where he will always be dealt with according to the opposite of what he deserves. Because God will never be his Judge again but only a Father, there is no fear of rejection for inadequate performance.

Yet for the young person who has come to Christ it can take time to appreciate the radical nature of what God has done in bringing him into the new Covenant of Grace. He is grateful to have his sins forgiven and to have this new relationship with God. He wants to live to please God and become what he believes and what he has been taught a Christian should be like. The model of a good Christian teenager in his mind (which might also be held up to him by adults) can easily become the standard he aspires to but by which he judges and assesses his own growth. He may indeed believe that others, including the Lord himself, assess him by these standards. Subtly, with the encouragement of Satan, these standards become rules – a new "law" – to be

observed. He agrees with it and to a measure may succeed in keeping it, especially if his temperament and learning style find it easy to conform. However, a point will come when he is not able to keep the very standards he aspires to and may even fail miserably.

Teenage Pressures

For the Christian teenager this is a huge issue. Perhaps he or she came to Christ at primary school. The temptations of the flesh at that age are relatively simple compared to the onslaught that hits them as teenagers. Suddenly, passions, desires, thoughts, and feelings are rising up within them which have a new power and a strange attraction. The standards to which the teenager aspires and which the adults in church or school continue to expect, conflict with internal desires. Temptation becomes much more subtle and yet more intense.

Failure, sin, even being tempted yet not sinning, can bring the condemnation that Satan, the accuser, has been biding his time to lay on the young Christian. If their conscience is sensitive the young believer will go through the cycle of repentance and confession and gain forgiveness. However, unconsciously the forgiven teenager can begin to fall under Works again. He may think: “if this happens again God will be displeased with me”; therefore, he may make a harder effort not to sin but does so out of a desire to avoid the condemnation he fears will result from God in the case of another failure. Subtly, he is bringing himself under Works. This is especially so when the teenager’s repentance and confession were motivated out of condemnation. This should not be the case since he cannot be condemned when he is in Christ. However, Satan is happy for him or her to repent and seek forgiveness provided that he can bring them under the deception of living under Works again to avoid further condemnation.

This is what Paul means by the spirit of slavery to fear as opposed to the Spirit of sonship. The spirit of slavery is only able to restrain sin out of fear of missing the good or receiving something evil. By depending and drawing on the Spirit of sonship the teenager can cry to the Father for help and deliverance and grace when temptation is severe and overwhelming.

Satan’s determination to get a believing Christian to live as if under Works has another twist which Paul deals with in Romans 7. The law, the standards we aspire to, actually provokes, and stimulates indwelling sin. Paul describes his own discovery, repeated in the experience of every Christian teenager. As he tried his best to keep the law and live up to the standards, he found he was doing the evil he did not want to do and not doing the good he did want. The law, which “was good”, actually “became death” to him in his experience. (Romans 7:13) Earlier in chapter 7:5 he said that before he was born again the law “aroused sinful passion” in his body. Only by being “released from the law” could he “serve in the new way of the Spirit”.

Thus Jamie, once he is born again, must be treated as someone who is in a completely different position by adults around him. This is especially so if he is from an unbelieving home, for there Works prevail over the whole family! It is the environment in which they live.

A Saviour from the Sin Within

The teenager must now be treated as someone who is about to discover that their need is not just a saviour from *sin* but someone to save them from *sins* that dwells within them. We emphasise *someone* to save him because high standards will not do it. In

fact, trying to keep the standards might actually strengthen the power of indwelling sin!

Thus, as he is confronted with the discipline expected of him in school, he will have to be helped to understand:

Why, although he is now a Christian he cannot always be good.

Why as a Christian he actually wants to do things that are wrong.

Why when he tries harder to keep the standards expected of him, he actually reacts inside even if he conforms outwardly, and *what*, really, is going on when he feels condemned and rejected for his behaviour.

Training Jamie in the way he should go is more than pointing to the standards and demanding he keep them.

It is more than confronting him for doing wrong and applying the appropriate sanctions.

It is even more than taking him through a process of confrontation, confession and forgiveness, reconciliation, and restitution.

It is helping him understand that his problem is indwelling sin, the *root* of his wrong behaviour, and that the law will never deal with that.

The Brute – The Root and Fruit

It is helping the teenager to realise that Satan – the brute – has targeted them with a strategy to bring them under the law and use the standards to drive them away from Christ whilst they are doing what they can to be faithful to Christ.

Jamie must be taught that he is dealing with the fruit, the root, and the brute when he is trying to grow as a Christian.

His teachers need to understand the strategy Satan is practising on Jamie. For instance, when they set forth a standard to Jamie which they want him to aspire to, what they are communicating out of Grace can be *heard by him* as *law*! Satan can ensure Jamie hears the teacher's *correction* which is a blessing as *rejection* which is a curse. Teachers have to "read the mail" of their students and know them better than themselves in this area. To truly disciple them they need to be able to get down with them and wrestle with the root and the brute and say, "I know exactly what this is like because I have the same struggles in my life". Otherwise, the teacher becomes the embodiment of the law, always right and never wrong. Parents and teachers cannot successfully disciple teenagers if they cannot share their own struggle with sin and temptation. Otherwise, the teenager feels condemned just because he or she is tempted. We have known eager young Christians give up their faith altogether because they could not control temptation by lustful thoughts and felt so hypocritical that they could not keep up what they saw as an "act".

Satan loses no time in saying to them, "look, if you were a Christian you would not be thinking things like that. How can you be a Christian? Look at the other Christians around you; they don't have thoughts and struggles like this. You are not the real thing at all." And when they find that, even though they are trying harder to keep the standards, perhaps even praying or reading the bible more, they get worse, they despair and give up.

Yet even though they think and act as if they are under Works, they are not! This is where it is fatal if their parents and teachers deal with them in a way that matches that covenant rather than Grace. We can never remind teenagers enough that grace is God's love for those who deserve the opposite. Works keep me striving to be certain of God's love based on my performance. Grace knows I will only ever deserve judgement and condemnation – no matter how “good” a Christian I have been. It is Christ's performance not mine that guarantees God's grace to me.

A Community Where We Get The Opposite To What We Deserve

The Christian family, and the Christian community, is a community founded on Grace. God's original plan was to extend the experience of loving and joyful community to people made in his image. His redemptive plan is the same. Only now he does so by placing his Son in every member which brings us a communion with God individually. It also provides the possibility of communion with one another. Adam and Eve, even in their innocent state could not match this type of community. Grace is people who are bound together by this covenant with God in Christ. Because they live under Grace they are able to relate to one another according to the opposite of what each deserves! When other members of the body do not keep the standard we do not go and condemn them. We do not reject, avoid, or isolate them. We deal with them according to the opposite of what they deserve – and they do the same for us.

In the Christian School, does the teaching staff reconstitute this community of grace? For students of such a community are taught in an environment of grace where they are:

- a. Being brought *into* Grace through faith in Christ by the use of law to bring conviction of sin.
- b. Being helped to grow *within* Grace by recognising the strategy of Satan to keep them under Works, from which Christ has freed them forever.

Do we feel that this approach will lead to a devaluing of standards and discipline? On the contrary it will lead to the very opposite. It will produce a real appreciation of the value and the limitations of the law and a heart that is truly able to say with the psalmist “Oh how I *love* your law”. The man under Works can never say that – however much he agrees with it and strives to keep it. Only someone like the psalmist, who had a revelation of the grace of God in the law could write such things. Surely this is what Christian teachers want their students to be able to echo. Surely it's what they want to be able to say themselves!

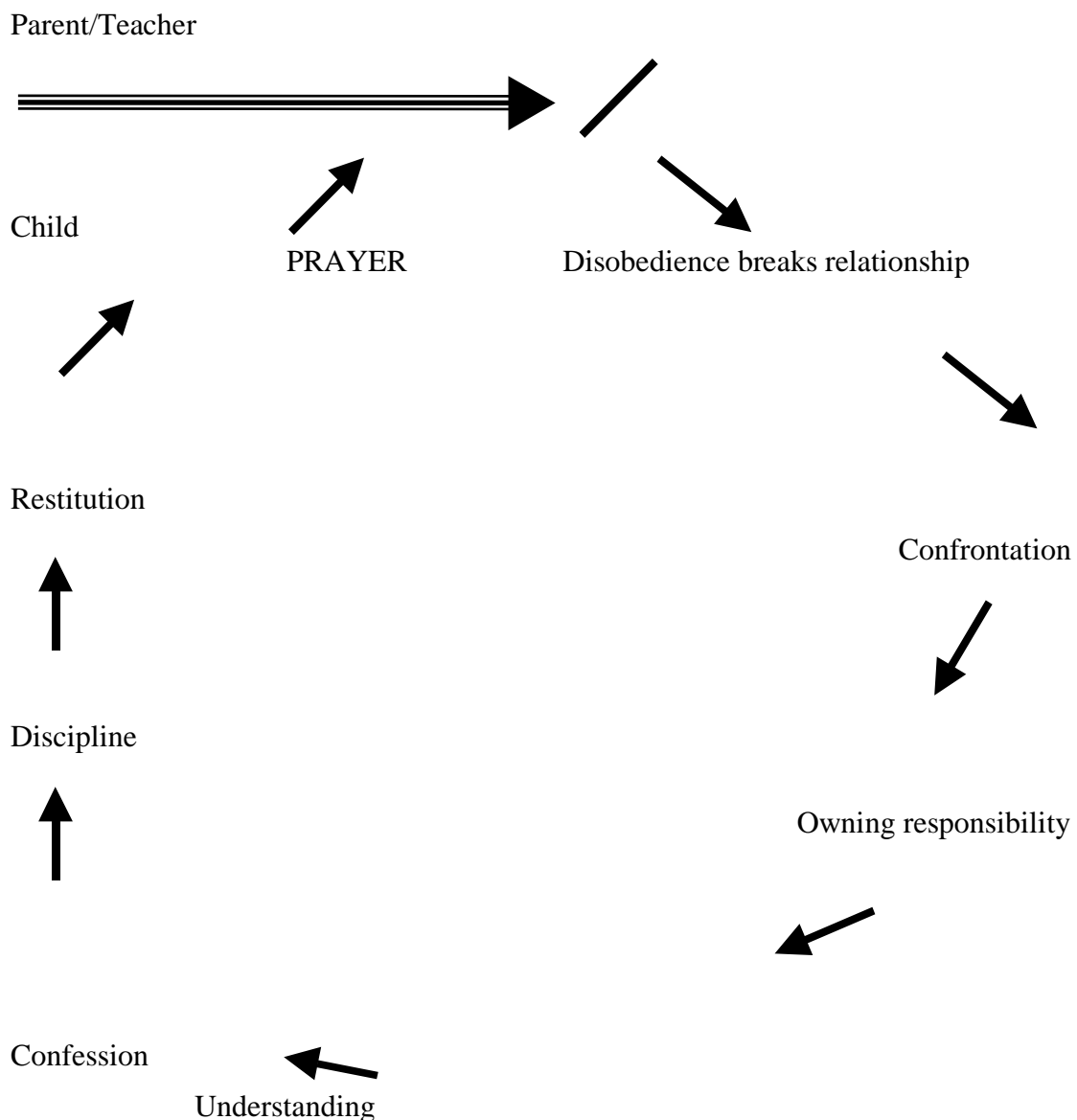
We are now ready to look at an approach to discipline based on this theological foundation of covenant.

Chapter 7

The Redemptive Cycle of Discipline

In classroom daily life, as we have already seen, both the unsaved and the Christian child will encounter problems within and without themselves. None of us, nor our communities, will be perfect until Christ returns. What practical steps then, can we as teachers take to ensure that we are dealing with discipline problems on the foundation of Grace? Over the years the following “cycle of discipline” has been used effectively with students of all ages. As we have seen, God’s short-term goal is to expose and deal with the sin, bringing accountability; but his long-term priority is always to restore the relationship. This is the aim of this cycle. Parents, as well as teachers, have testified to the effectiveness of it.

The Discipline Cycle



We must beware of using it just as a tool to resolve problems – if it is not in the spirit of grace it will not achieve its purpose of working with the Holy Spirit to change the heart of the student and to restore the relationship with the Trinity.

At the top of the cycle is an arrow indicating the forward progress of the teacher and pupil, (or in a home situation, the parents and child) they walk together in harmony until sin enters in and breaks the relationship. The student falls in temptation to some action or attitude and is dislocated from the relationship by their guilt.

Step 1: Confrontation

Immediately the teacher or parent must step in and, as we saw with Adam and Eve and with Jamie, the first encounter must help the student to face the situation. They may want to hide; eye contact will undoubtedly be lost but the first question must be asked: “Did you do this? Have you done this?” At this point the student will decide whether to own up or not. If there are witnesses, as in Jamie’s case, this must be firmly but gently pressed until the incident is owned by an admission “I did it”. This takes them to:

Step 2: Owning responsibility

Owning responsibility is an important step for accountability – a step avoided by both Adam and Eve! What if there is no ownership? What if there is no proof, but you or others, suspect the student? Without witnesses the teacher is left with no option but to accept the student’s denial if this is their stance. We do not have omniscient knowledge! The suspicion will be pursued by questioning but ultimately the student’s answer must be temporarily accepted. “If you’re sure you are not involved we will leave the matter. If you want to talk further at any time, I am available.”

The Ambush Prayer

In such a case it is important now to pray what I call “The Ambush Prayer”! If this student is guilty then we pray to God “to ambush” them by them falling into sin when there *are* witnesses. My experience over several years is that God will do this as he is committed to helping them to face any such character failure. We may also pray for conviction by the Holy Spirit. In one incident of a stolen watch in our school while we were fairly sure who was guilty, the person totally denied it. As a staff we prayed, and it took three weeks for the student we suspected to come forward and admit his guilt.

Step 3: Understanding

Once the student has owned up we must ensure he must fully understand (a) that it was wrong (b) what consequences it could lead to. In the case of young children, we may be dealing with immaturity and a complete unawareness that their action was wrong. In the case of students new to school there may be an ignorance of certain aspects of the school’s code of conduct – allowances must be made for this.

In the case of Philip, aged 5, who had been seen throwing a stone in the playground, the issue was clouded both by his immaturity and his lack of awareness of the dangers of such an action. However, there was a third complication. When asked “did you throw a stone?” the answer came “Gary made me”. It was difficult to get him to budge from this displacement of guilt. Repeatedly he excused himself by blaming Gary! In the end the conversation went like this:

Teacher: “Yes we will deal with Gary in a minute, but whose hand picked up the stone?”

Philip: “Mine, but Gary made me!”

Teacher: “Yes – but whose hand threw the stone, Philip?”

Philip: “Mine – but -”

Teacher: “So whose fault was it really, Philip?”

Philip: (the light dawning) “Mine”

Teacher: (pewh!)

Step 4: Confession, I’m sorry

We’re after more than a taken grunt of “sorry” here. It is godly sorrow that leads us to true repentance. (2 Corinthians 7:10) We need the conviction of the Holy Spirit to produce the necessary humbling and genuine sorrow. If two pupils had been fighting and are brought “steaming” to the Head it is best to give them time to cool off before dealing with the issue. The heat of emotions will only cloud their thinking and they will not be able to articulate properly. We may need to leave the guilty to think around their offence until they are really sorry.

Step 5: Discipline

The next step is for the teacher to decide in conjunction with the Holy Spirit (quick arrow prayers will be heard!) what correction is needed. This depends on the school’s code of conduct and the type of sanctions available. It also depends on the student’s past record. If this is a first offence we would deal differently than with persistent disobedience. For the unsaved child who is still operating under Works we will be claiming the promise in Galatians 3:24 “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.” “The law”, our code of acceptable behaviour in our community, confronts the student with his sin even though the plumbline sets a standard for all to see how much they’re out of line. This faces the student with the conviction of their heart and can show them their need of a saviour. They must come to realise, particularly in the case of persistent disobedience, that they are unable to crack this on their own. They need the help of God. At this point, with that revelation, they can be led through repentance to the acceptance of Christ and the power available to them through the Holy Spirit. In the case of a Christian student, it should be easier to appeal to their conscience. When the necessary disciplinary correction is decided it is good to get the student’s agreement that this is just – even if unpleasant. “Yes, you warned me, I accept this correction” or “I agree this is right.” Of course, in the case where the Holy Spirit leads a teacher to exercise grace – the opposite to what they deserve – this needs explaining both to the culprit and to the rest of the class. Their cry of “injustice!” or “it’s not fair!” must be met with the fact that they might be glad, one day in future, that God may do the same for them! This is grace! It is a wise teacher who prepares this ground at the start of a year, discussing the role of the Holy Spirit and the meaning of grace.

Step 6: Prayer and Forgiveness

It is important to bring the student and the issue before God in prayer. This gives opportunity for the student to express to God their regret, their offence and ask his forgiveness. Just as important, it gives the teacher opportunity to ask God to work on

the internal spirit and heart of the student, changing them to be more like God. This prayer is nearly always a special time. God is at work. Afterwards a warm encouragement, with expressions of a better future should set the seal on the issue, leaving only one final step of restitution, where necessary. This sort of interview should always be attended by another teacher or adult as a witness. At least one teacher/ adult must be the same sex as the student to guard against any charges of impropriety.

Step 7: Restitution

Where the student needs to repay or restore something taken or broken or where they need to apologise to some or, as in Jamie's case, to the whole class, this needs doing immediately. A useful general principle I learned from a fellow church leader was "the circle of your transgression is the circle of your confession." In other words, those affected by your sin are those to whom you need to confess.

Thus, the cycle is completed, the sin is dealt with, the issue is resolved clearly and completely. So, there are no looming threats of "no games for a week" or in a case being resolved by parents in the home, "no pocket money for a week" or "no television for a week/month". These, in my view, are unfair and unproductive. God doesn't deal with us like this, leaving brooding punishments hanging over us. Yes, there may need to be temporary removal of certain privileges; but our aim generally must be to correct clearly and quickly and demonstrate grace.

In school this cycle needs doing in private not in front of the class. In dealing with major incidents, we may need 15-20 minutes; in more minor incidents we may follow the same procedure in 5 minutes using a private conversation, even in the classroom, but out of earshot of class members.

On countless occasions I have seen students led out of their sin and brought into peace which in turn leads to a growth in their maturity. Most important of all, when we have completed the cycle, relationship is restored and fellowship with God is now unhindered. We have been redemptive. This is surely God's heart. How important it is that we should try to walk in step with the Holy Spirit!

Chapter 8

Education's True Purpose

It is possible for us to be sincere and dedicated educators and still to miss God's true purpose and goal for education. Education was never meant to be an end in itself; it can only serve God's purposes in training God's children if it is based on the biblical model of discipleship. For God's goal is that we fully know him, for this is eternal life (John 17:3)

Education is part of the Great Commission given by Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

We need to note that many of Jesus' disciples were teenagers, and this commission applies to all aspects of teaching which, in a Christian community, will be discipling character as well as teaching academics, into godly principles and values just as Jesus did. This is why we believe that our goal in education should be wisdom – knowing how to live for God and applying our knowledge to serving God's plan. As Solomon says in Proverbs, the traditional book of wisdom, "wisdom is supreme; therefore, get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."

Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God personified. Colossians 2:3 shows us that we cannot fully educate without him at the centre of the education process. "In him, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" – a pretty all-embracing statement! This means that there is no true knowledge outside of Christ.

Melanie Phillips, writing in 1990, "All Must Have Prizes" paints a sweeping indictment of the British secular education system. Whether her blistering attack is right or not, she rightly recognises the essence of education "What has happened (in our education system) is nothing less than a breakdown of the accepted conventions of the transmission of culture, which, if it is to survive, has to handed down in an orderly and systematic manner from adults to children.....knowledge, the transmission of received wisdom from one generation to the next, has been disinherited and memory scorned."³

Melanie Phillips is concerned at the breakdown of what we may call "generational transfer". In Christian education we teachers are like relay runners passing on a baton, on which is written, not just academic knowledge but how our faith, our values, our revelation, and the word of God interpret and expand knowledge. For knowledge and wisdom (how to apply our knowledge) to be received, it must be imparted like a baton by the mature generation through a bridge of relationship to a younger generation who must be willing to be receptive. This is the way God intended education to take place: it is a transmission of life from the living to the living. The Bible calls this discipleship.

For us as Christians, knowledge is not primarily factual – relegated only to the mental and rational process. Rather, as with Jesus' discipleship, it is sharing life in God

³ All Must Have Prizes by Melanie Phillips p64

together. A disciple is one who learns from another within a relationship of unconditional love – this is Grace! The disciple learns from his mentor how to relate to God in every aspect of life, using the wise principles God has revealed in his word. In the school context this means discovering that every subject is related to God and reveals aspects of him and his truth in creation. To read more about this we recommend some books at the end of this chapter.

It need hardly be emphasised that curriculum without the right teacher will be ineffective. Unless the teacher, or parent, themselves understand and live in the good of Grace they cannot, no matter how much they try to, impart grace. We may think “grace” as much as we like, but actual grace can only be imparted by the Spirit of God where it is truth in the experience in the teacher or parents. This is why the vision of Christian education comes down to how Christian teachers deal with the Jamies of this world. A parody to illustrate the opposite of true impartation is the story of the R.E. teacher in the Dickensian era who was frustrated because a boy had not learnt the memory verse. Calling him out, he lost his temper and emphasising each word with a slap in the face, he shouted, “How many more times must I tell you? God (smack) is (smack) love (smack)!” Love was spoken but certainly not imparted!

Ideally, education is taking place in an all-age community to demonstrate God’s grace. In this way the “school” is fully integrated into the church and parents, teachers, church members and leaders are all learning together the truth about our wonderful God. This is truly education for Life – a Life everlasting as well as temporal on this earth. So, the community prevents the school becoming an institution by integrating it fully into the “family” of the church.

Obviously, this is an ideal and many godly parents and church leaders have obeyed God’s prompting to start their school without such church integration and support. God is faithful and several testimonies of his faithfulness to many of the Christian schools over the last 30 years can be discovered in “The Love of God in the Classroom” (see end of chapter).

The Spirit of God will, if we ask, keep guiding us into all truth, so that by living in the clean atmosphere and cleaning stream of Grace we avoid institutionalism and raise sons and daughters who carry this wonderful grace to others in their generation, increasing “the knowledge of the glory” of the true God. Thus, this wonderful promise, an inspiring vision for us to run towards in our race of faith, will be brought nearer to fulfilment.

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” Habakkuk 2:14

Recommended Future Reading

On Christian Education

“What are You Teaching in School?” Brian Watts

“Walking with God in the Classroom” Harro Van Brummelen

“The Bible and the Task of Teaching” David Smith and John Shortt

“The Love of God in the Classroom” Sylvia Baker and David Freeman

“The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum” Rousas J Rushdooney

“Fighting the Secular Giants” Stephen Thomas and David Freeman

On the Covenant of Grace

“The World of Grace” William Still

“God’s Lavish Grace” Terry Virgo

On Discipline

“Dare to Discipline” James Dobson

“Bringing up Boys” James Dobson

On Teenagers

“Disconnected Generation” Josh McDowell

“Beyond Belief to Conviction” Josh McDowell

On World View

“Creation Regained” Albert M Wolters

“The World Next Door” James Sire