

The Nature of the Word Part 5  
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Concluding this series, we will look at that which I consider to be central to an understanding of the nature of the Word of God. In II Cor. 3:6, we read, "...who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (NAS).

A merely cursory reading of that statement in its context might lead one to assume that when Paul speaks of "the letter" it is to be understood as simply synonymous with the written law, or old covenant. With that misunderstanding, one can mistake one's mere conceptual grasp of, and intellectual assent to the principle of grace as indications that he is safe from the effects of the letter while, all the while, being killed by that element within the law that makes the law an agency of death.

Paul's meaning goes deeper than that. By the expression, "the letter," Paul opens up to us, and confronts us with an essential element within the dispensation of the law, a wolf-element that may appear in the sheep's clothing of the biblical teaching about grace and the Spirit.

The killing element within the law is most seductive and innocent appearing. What possible harm could there be in words that inform us concerning the will of God? And I raise the question, is it possible that, even as one becomes conceptually clearer and clearer regarding the difference between law and grace, that they might, at the same time, be subject to the killing effect of the letter?

Well, here's the principle involved: There is a difference between God-information and God Himself. The difference is a matter of life and death! The understanding that is intrinsic to God giving Himself to us to be our life is of a totally different nature than what we acquire by objectifying truth as something we can sneak out of God without becoming intimate with Him.

Understand this; when we seek to acquire knowledge out from the mind of God, we do so in an attempt to get from Him what we think we need in order to please Him. Immediately the relationship from our side is disturbed and we actually objectify God, reducing Him to a moral, ethical, and theological standard of measurement, rather than our Life-giving Father. We have changed the relationship, in our thinking, from the relationship of precious children of a Father who delights in our being, to students in need of information from an instructor, in order to stay on His good side. It is alien to our being and thus poisonous.

May I suggest an amplified translation of the passage in consideration:

"...who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter [that is, the letter of the new covenant], but of the Spirit; for the letter [even the letter of the new covenant] kills, but the Spirit [Himself only] gives life."

It seems clear to me that when we look back at the law from a position of being informed about grace, Spirit and life, the killing element within the law is quite obvious to us, but, at the same time, we may not be aware of the covert presence of that element hiding in teaching about, not only, grace, Spirit and life but also reconciliation, kingdom, sonship, etc.

This thought kept coming to me (and I'd be interested to hear from readers about this), that eating from The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil constitutes stealing from God what is already included in the gift of Himself to us.

To know good and evil as something shared with us in communion with Himself, is to understand the mystery of godliness and the mystery of iniquity as God understands them, to know them in their place in the outworking of perfect love.

No, I do not mean merely the concept that everything will turn out all right, but to be so immersed in the love of God, that the sting is taken out of death and all that is included in it, and we come to really know all things, including good and evil, as Love knows them. I have become increasingly aware of how the very best of biblical teaching

can be death to me, and I am increasingly sensitive to that killing element.

There is the ever present voice that calls to us, "You need this knowledge; you'll be spiritually deficient without it, and you'll 'lose out with God' without it." One thing about that old serpent, he's tenacious. But then again, how could we have come to the knowledge which is life, without the preview of that knowledge which is death? So God will be faithful, and is Himself, in Christ, the transition from one to the other. In that transition, I am finding that anything other than knowing Christ as all in all, is becoming tedious and boring.