

## The Sufficiency of Christ



David Wilkerson July 23, 2012

“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17).

I’ve always wondered about one phrase in this verse: “He had to…” This passage refers to Jesus, of course. Why would Jesus have to do anything? He’s God. We read of him choosing to come to earth, choosing to heal, choosing to love everyone around him. So, why does this say he had to do what he did — becoming flesh and serving as a living sacrifice for our sins? Couldn’t he just as easily have declared from heaven, “I’ll send angels to bring redemption to humankind”? Here is one of the few instances in Scripture where the Lord is engaging in a *commanded endeavor*. Why?

**To understand why Jesus “had to be made like his brothers in every respect,” we first have to understand the New Covenant.**

We all know that under the New Covenant our sins are covered by Christ’s gift of grace. So, what is a covenant? It’s an agreement between two or more parties where each is required to fulfill certain terms. There are all kinds of covenants, including a marriage covenant, where two people become one entity. Legal contracts are covenants for businesses, when, for example, two owners merge their efforts so that both sides benefit. Peace treaties between nations are covenants, where warring sides agree to cease hostilities and benefit one another in other ways.

Throughout the Bible we see God making covenants with his people. In each case he says, “Here is what I’ll do on my end. And as you keep your end, here are the blessings and benefits that will come to you.” God has always kept his end of these covenants. Yet man has never been able to. He has continually failed to uphold his end in every covenant.

The first covenant God made was with Adam, who broke it by falling to temptation by Satan. Noah also took part in God’s covenant, when God promised he would never destroy the earth again by water. Immediately after the flood, Noah got drunk, breaking the covenant, which was to apply only as God’s law was upheld. Even today no Christian can improve on this pattern. None of us is able to keep covenant with God no matter how good our intentions are. Our hearts are bent on backsliding, turning from his ways to go off on our own.

The Lord foresaw all of this. And from the very beginning he made plans to put into place a perfect covenant that couldn’t be broken. He would enact a covenant like none before it, one with a unique provision: a surety that neither side would ever break the covenant.

Let me point out that God never had to make a covenant in order to love us. His very nature is love. To ask him to love us is like asking a well of water, “Water, promise me you’ll be water. Promise that if I drink from you, my thirst will be quenched. Promise that if I stay under your surface, I won’t be able to breathe. Promise that if I can swim I’ll stay on top of your surface.” These are silly requests because they’re givens, all a part of water’s basic nature.

The same is true with God. He doesn’t have to promise to be merciful to us, to forgive us, to cleanse us from sin, to impute his righteousness to us. These things are just who he is. To not love us, God would have to change his

own nature — and Scripture says God is unchanging. So when God makes covenant with us, he's doing us a favor by putting it into formal language. He's saying, "You can't comprehend my heart or my nature, so I'll put it in a covenant for you." This should tell us how solid a foundation we have in God's covenant surety.

*The problem has never been with God's part of the covenant. It has always been with our part.* God tells us to love our neighbor but we don't. He tells us to seek him with all our heart but we don't. Plain and simple, we're a covenant-breaking people. How did God deal with this? How did he go about making a "better covenant" as Hebrews describes it (see 7:22, 8:1, 8:6)? How could he possibly improve something that had never fully worked?

He did it by making covenant not with man, but with a man — Jesus. Many Christians think the New Covenant is exclusively an agreement between God and man. It isn't — it's a covenant between the Father and his Son. Christ was the man God chose to make this covenant with — not Adam, not Noah, not you or me. I love the phrase Martin Luther used to describe this: Christ was "a man of God's own choosing." It was Jesus whom God chose to send to earth, who would stand in our place, who would take on our role in covenant with the Father. And when Jesus walked on earth, he kept the law perfectly. He obeyed every command God ever gave, doing everything the Lord required of his people. If God wanted it done, Jesus did it — and the Bible says he did it with joy. So when the Father looked on his Son, he said, "You have lived man's end of the covenant perfectly. One man has found merit with me." This is why we read in Hebrews, "This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant" (7:22). Jesus himself is the guarantee that the covenant is being kept. Every other man would fail at this, but one man keeps the covenant perfectly: Jesus. That is our surety.

### **When Jesus "took our place," it was more than just on the cross.**

Jesus did take our place by standing condemned for our sins. Yet he also took our place in another respect: as one who walked perfectly in covenant with God. Jesus lived as a man who was sinless, spotless, a keeper of every holy command. And fulfilling the law with perfect obedience, he made the covenant complete. That is incredible news.

Yet here is even greater news: Jesus hasn't kept the benefits of the covenant to himself, but shares them with us all. When he stands before the Father, he says, "I've brought my friends with me to share in the blessings of your covenant. As they stand before you, they stand in me. So all my righteousness is theirs. Their forgiveness is activated through our covenant, Father."

Thank God he didn't choose us to keep covenant with him! Yet the man who has kept the covenant perfectly asks us to join him in his covenant relationship with the Father. And when we say yes, we walk in Christ's own Spirit. This is what Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied when they said, "God will put a new heart in you, one that enables you to keep his commands."

Some Christians are overwhelmed at the thought of keeping God's commands. They think, "I've got to read my Bible more, pray more, evangelize more." If you think that way, you're not living under the New Covenant — you're living under the Mosaic law. And it's utter misery because you can never fully keep the law. When you break one part of it, you break it all.

Yet when you came to Christ, hopefully the revelation of God's New Covenant set off a light of understanding in you. You didn't have to be commanded to seek God's face, to share the good news of Christ with your neighbor, to know freedom in the One who accomplished all for you. *His nature began to transform your nature* — and you did these things with a heart of joy.

This is the glory of the New Covenant. It was evident on the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus had taken three of his disciples. The glory was so immense that for a moment a glimpse of heaven broke through to the earthly realm. Suddenly, the disciples — Peter, James and John — saw Moses and Elijah talking with Christ. Peter was so amazed by this he cried, "We need to build three tabernacles here." Peter was seeing several covenants of God at once — in Jesus, in Moses and in the prophets.

But God the Father removed Moses (the law) and Elijah (the prophets) from Peter's vision, saying, "My Son embodies all the law and the prophets, the whole of every covenant — all that humankind will ever need. You have one command now, Peter, and that is to focus on Christ. When you love as he loves, with my Spirit in you, you fulfill all the law of Moses and the prophets. The law isn't the driving force of your life — Jesus is."

What a moment of revelation for Peter — and for us today! Fulfilling God's law isn't the reason we read our Bibles

or pray. We do it to know our loving Father. Likewise, in the Father's eyes, all of humankind's needs are fulfilled completely in Jesus. It's why as God looks on us today, he doesn't see people breaking his covenant continually. Instead, he sees in us the marks of his Son — and therefore looks on us as covenant keepers! He doesn't see a list of failures next to a list of good works, with a huge imbalance in between. He doesn't see our works at all. He sees only his Son in us. And as he does, he bestows on us all the benefits of his covenant with the Son. All forgiveness is ours. All peace is ours. All acceptance is ours. All grace abounds to us, regardless of whether we're up or down, succeeding or failing. His grace to us never changes.

### **Christ needs no assistance from us with his work of grace.**

You may wonder, "Don't I have a part in the work of grace?" If you try to bring something to Christ's work of grace, you'll only mess it up. It's impossible to add to his glorious grace with our rags of unrighteousness. We don't contain grace — we only receive it. We may give it out, but it is God's grace, not ours.

This is what Hebrews means when it says we "trample" the blood of Christ when we try to add something to God's grace. We actually dilute it, insulting the glorious work he has done. In fact, at any given time we are operating in one of two modes: (1) We're either allowing God to say we are insufficient, and we accept the totality of his grace; or (2) we're calling his grace insufficient and attempting to add our efforts to it.

You may say, "But if I believed that, I'd never do anything for God." Actually, the opposite is true. When you live in the grace of Christ, you do more works than ever — because you do them in joy rather than with a grudging sense of obligation. You go to prayer because you love God's holiness. You study his Word not because it contains your to-do list for the day, but because it's your life source, your wellspring of peace, joy and direction.

Simply put, grace empowers godly action. So if you're miserable in your walk with Christ — if you're weary, going to church because you fear for your salvation — then you've fallen from the appropriation of his grace. Right now, he's inviting you back, saying, "Come into the covenant I have with the Father. I want to pour my grace over you, to empower you with my Spirit for life."

### **There are four essentials of grace for every follower of Jesus.**

1. *Grace is unassisted.* We can't "assist" the work of Christ's grace without diluting or diminishing it.
2. *Grace is unmerited.* When we detect some unrighteousness in our lives, many of us think we have to pump up our grace again with good works. No — Christ's grace toward us is totally unmerited, never partially so.
3. *Grace is unchanging.* God's grace doesn't apply less on the days we pray less. It doesn't work that way. Even his warnings against sin are a sign of his loving grace.
4. *Grace is unending.* Neither the Father nor the Son will be unfaithful to the covenant they've made. It will last through eternity, never to be broken. So as we remain hid in Christ, we remain in covenant with the Father — and we're thus safe and secure.

Let me say this as well: I know the covenant that the Father has made with the Son is deeper, stronger and more far-reaching than any of us can grasp. Many Christians fall short of his glorious grace, our lives run by fear. When we make a mistake, we tell ourselves, "Oh, no, I've broken covenant with the Lord." Nothing could be more untrue. It's Jesus who is in covenant with the Father, not us!

This is the reason Christ had to become fully human, made like us. He completely fulfills the covenant on our behalf — and he invites us to partake of all its benefits. Through him we are fully cleansed, fully at peace with God and abounding in his grace. We can't add anything to his finished work — his grace is fully sufficient. It is our role to receive the glorious gift — and to walk in it with joy!

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