The Likeness Project

The Forgotten Covenant of Jesus

Perry Lewis Stiltz IV

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Introduction

Today the 'Word of God' is usually equated with the Scriptures. But what about the 'word of God' that existed *prior* to the New Testament? What was *that* 'word' really about? In the first few centuries 'the word' (logos) went throughout the known world and changed hearts everywhere it went. But what exactly was that message that caused so many to repent and change their lives?

Was it a spirit or a law? Was it the thought 'Jesus is the messiah' or 'he died for our sins'? Was it 'love', 'trusting God' or 'knowledge of Christ'?

I have a theory. This theory is simply that '*the* Word' (logos) is a reference to *the New Covenant* – the covenant Jesus institutes at the Passover. *A covenant of Christ 'likeness'* – of partaking and abiding in his spiritual likeness. My theory is that every teaching or doctrine we read about in the New Testament is simply *the result* of his disciples striving to teach 'Christ and his New Covenant'.

This book strives to convey the first-century simplicity of Christ and his message of godliness. The good news is that *the Good News of Christ* is actually quite simple. This 'Good News' is 'likeness', or more specifically 'God likeness'. It is simply understanding Christ – the perfect spirit that Jesus revealed at the cross.

Christ came to deliver to mankind a pathway of holiness – a path that would change us at our core. He came to deliver spiritual riches through himself – through our 'knowledge of him' – our growing understanding of his spiritual likeness. He came to be both our source and our destination. He came to remind us of God's goodness and greatness, and the 'God likeness' we were designed to be.

> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness."
> – Genesis 1:25a NASB

The Christianity of the first century is simply discipleship or 'following Christ'. It is understanding Jesus *as* the spiritual *Way* back to our loving Father. It is growing in the love, strength, humility, and joy of the Lord. It is increasing our alignment with him – the perfect human or 'likeness of God'.

Why Recovering First Century Christianity is so Challenging

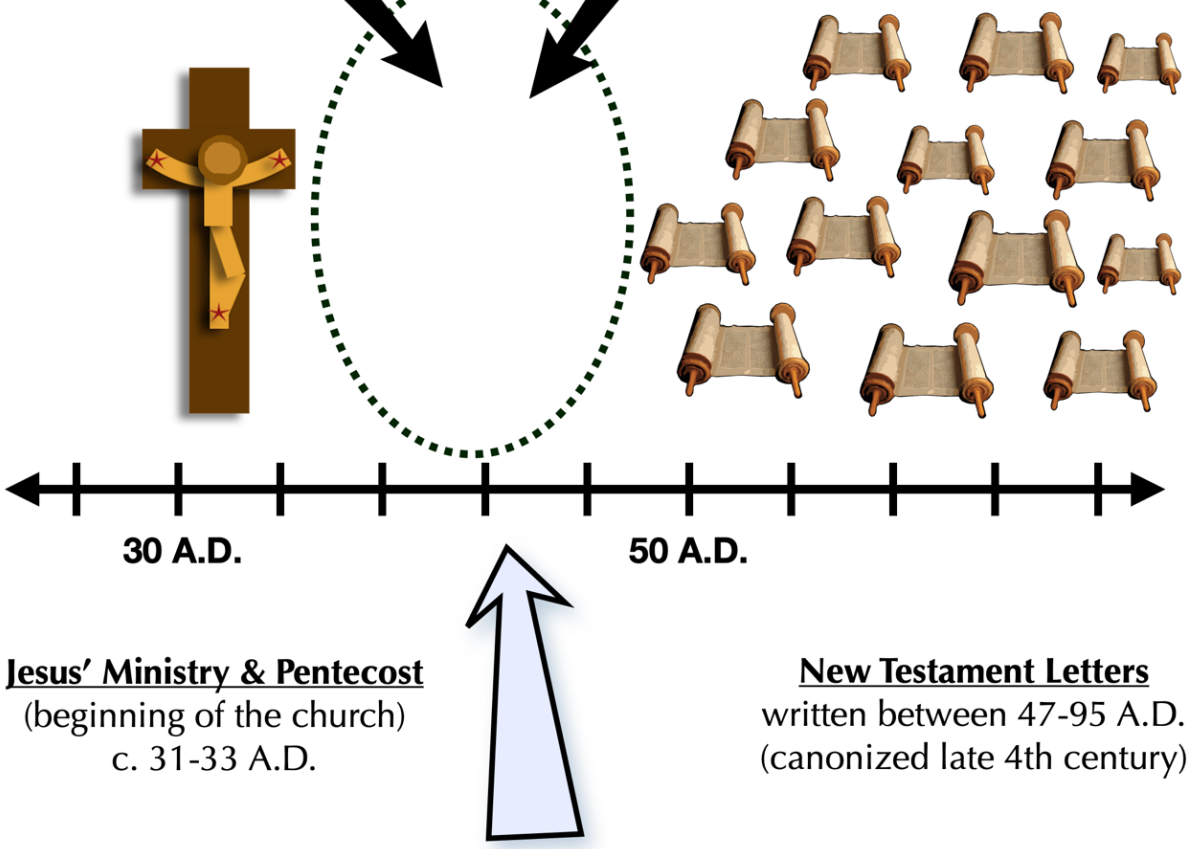
But this covenant (of Christ 'likeness') has been hidden by today's muddled Christianity. It has been obfuscated and forgotten through centuries of vague terms, unclear purposes, and leadership with varying motivations. It is a haze of doctrines and traditions that have been passed down through the centuries. It is a "believe in Jesus" mission, with no clear meaning to 'believe' or 'Jesus', and what that actually means in everyday life. It is a fog that has come about through centuries of emphasizing the peripheral (traditions, church hierarchy, etc.) while deemphasizing what the Creator really wants: godliness (God 'likeness' or Christ-in-mankind).

What was ‘the Way’?

What was ‘following Christ’ prior to the New Testament?

What was ‘**the Faith**’
of those first followers?

What was ‘**the Word**’, ‘**the Truth**’ or
‘**the Way**’ for those first followers?



Jesus’ Ministry & Pentecost
(beginning of the church)
c. 31-33 A.D.

New Testament Letters
written between 47-95 A.D.
(canonized late 4th century)

What was ‘the Way’ of the early church?
What was the apostles’ notion of ‘following Christ’?
What was their notion of ‘the Word of God’?
Why were they willing to give up their lives?
How did Jesus and the cross help the church overcome sin?
Could their perspective help us bring peace, love, and unity to the church?
Could understanding their terms help us understand the New Testament?

"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?”
But we have the mind of Christ. —1 Corinthians 2:16 ESV

Here are just a few of the factors that have created today's varied Christian teachings and practices:

> **Ambiguity with our terminology:** Today everyone seems to have their own basket of meanings. My notion of 'faith' is personally defined, and therefore probably not your notion of 'faith'. 'Holy Spirit', 'love', and 'the word of God' are a few more of today's ambiguous terms. This linguistic landscape is fluid, effectively turning Christianity into a nebulous fog of personal interpretations and theologies. But first-century Christianity wasn't caught up in terminological debates. It was a faith that was determined and completed by Jesus himself. It was not a set of words or even actions. It was essentially spiritual alignment with the ultimate spirit – Christ.
>
> **Vague Purposes:** What is the purpose of God? What precisely is the purpose of Christianity? Is it "salvation" or "preaching the word"? And what exactly do these concepts mean? First-century Christianity didn't have to debate its purpose: it was plain for all to see. It was "salvation from sins" *through* Christ Jesus – through pointing our spirits at his perfect spirit and growing in Christ's likeness. "Preaching the Word" was preaching "Christ" and "discipleship into his likeness" as was revealed through the New Covenant. This was their overriding and all-encompassing purpose.
>
> **Christian clichés:** "You just need to believe," "Christ died for your sins," and "trust God" are just a few of today's Christian clichés. Phrases like these have largely lost their power and effectiveness as they are rarely connected to the purpose of God. But *the purpose of God* was front and center in the first century for Christians – it was a new covenant that was simply about discipleship – growing in godliness as revealed through Christ.
>
> **Bible-centeredness:** Today's Christianity is largely centered upon figuring out the 31,103 verses of the Bible rather than understanding and aligning with the perfect spirit of Christ. This is largely due to conflating 'the word' with 'the Bible'. What mattered was the 'New Covenant' – a covenant of discipleship into the spirit of Christ. For first-century Christians, the New Testament literally did not exist – it was compiled and canonized three centuries later. But it was not written to be *the source for faith*. It was written to point people back to Christ Jesus (the source for faith).

But Christianity hasn't always been like that. The faith of the first century was not muddled or hazy. It was clear, directional, and pointing mankind clearly at the spirit of this man from Nazareth. It was both meaningful and purposeful as he truly was their door to spiritual wholeness. When the muddle is stripped away, this theory is ultimately about 'spirit' (holiness/godliness/God 'likeness') and *not* about works, doctrines, or even theologies. In the first century, it was purely about *godliness through Christ-likeness*. It was about claiming *Christ as Lord* and then following *his instructions*. It was about 'abiding in Christ'. It was about a group of people committed to God's new doctrine of 'love one another as I have loved you'.

This faith wasn't sourced from the Scriptures or even a collection of Jesus' writings. It was sourced from Christ himself – his spirit and his commandment to "love one another as I have loved you." To be clear, the Bible is good and holy, but it was not meant to be *the source* for God's people. God Himself (thru Christ) was meant to be our source. The Creator sent His Spirit

through the man Jesus, *so that* we may grow in godliness (a kind of 'oneness' with the Creator). This faith was powerful and inspiring as it offered the spiritual riches and purpose of the Creator himself! It was godliness through understanding *the faith* of this carpenter's son – a man who is *one* with God:

> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith – Hebrews 12:2a ESV

First-century Christianity was simply about replacing the world's faulty foundations with God's foundation – Christ – the God 'likeness' we were designed to have. This was the commission of the apostles. They were not commissioned to start a new faith or religion. They were commissioned to teach Christ and what it means to 'follow him'. Christianity was spiritual discipleship. It was a community that **believed Jesus himself was *'the Word of God'*** – God's ultimate message – a revealing of everything that leads us to life, godliness, and even 'oneness with God'.

> And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. – 1John 3:23-24 ESV

The Way in the first century was about believing in the man Jesus (as the Messiah) and then following His ultimate instruction. It was *a direction* **–** the direction of spiritual perfection and wholeness. It is about growing into the perfect 'likeness' of this man from Nazareth. It is about understanding his thoughts, values, beliefs, priorities and growing in God's purpose. It is about putting on his love and humility – the infinite, eternal, and indestructible 'likeness' of God.

God's Ultimate Purpose

God has one overarching purpose for everything. It can be described in a variety of different ways like "repentance," "to seek and save the lost," "His kingdom on earth," or our "salvation from sins". But regardless of the language, these concepts all point us back to one very powerful purpose: *our realization of our own God 'likeness'*, or *Christ-in-mankind.*

Everything Jesus did was for this sole/soul purpose, from his teachings to his walk to the cross. He was not just simply paying for our sins. He was showing us *the way* we (through his spiritual likeness) can become spiritually clean. He was giving mankind a *path toward godliness* – his perishable physical body *revealing to humanity* that which is imperishable – our God 'likeness'.

> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." –1 Corinthians 15:53-54 ESV

This imperishable 'likeness' in mankind was the ultimate purpose for the writings of the apostles – this was their God-given commission. It was *victory over sin* through a personal realization of Christ – the manifesting of our own God 'likeness':

> My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.
> – Galatians 4:19 NASB

This one overarching purpose is revealed through God's ***New Covenant***. It is revealed through Jesus – his spiritual likeness. It is revealed through his instructions of 'abiding in me' and 'partaking of my blood'. It was consummated through their submission to Christ (as Lord and King), and then maintained through their willing obedience to *God's New Commandment*:

> This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.
> – John 15:12 NASB

This is the commandment Jesus gives his disciples the night before he demonstrates the infinite love of God *through* the ultimate sacrifice. This one instruction was the purpose of Jesus himself – a perfect and complete summation of all of God's instructions.

But this was more than an instruction. This was God's new standard – a new set of expectations. This new commandment was not a new set of works or traditions. This was spiritual 'life' as it was God *pouring out His own 'likeness'* upon mankind. It was an offer to understand the love, strength, peace, and joy of God Himself. It wasn't godliness through human works or doctrines. This was godliness through *being the likeness we were designed to be.* This was a 'new' direction for mankind – a reorientation towards Jesus and his walk to the cross (the love and spiritual perfection that humanity has forgotten).

This New Commandment is what made Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life. To understand this new *way of being* in the world, first-century Christians needed to understand Christ, the cross, and the spirit that compels him to go to the cross. This new commandment was God molding their hearts through this episode at Calvary – through their intimate knowledge of Jesus and his love for mankind.

The Design of this Book

My purpose in writing this book can be summed up through two fundamental questions:

1. What precisely was the faith and purpose of those first believers?
2. What would happen if we truly were able to align with their faith and purpose?

While nothing might seem easier to understand, there are three barriers to understanding the faith of first-century Christians. Each of these barriers corresponds to a section of this book.

> **1. What is the New Covenant?** Today there is little emphasis or understanding regarding the nature or terms of a covenant. In the first century, the Hebrews understood the weight and importance of their covenant with God. They understood that breaking the Ten Commandments was sin and separation from God. The 'New Covenant' (that Christ institutes) is about *grace* and *reconciliation* with God through partaking and growing in the spirit of Christ. As the old covenant was a promise to follow the Law of Moses (the Ten Commandments), the new covenant is a promise to follow the Law of Christ ("love one another as I have loved you").
>
> **2. What is the Word of God?** Is it the physical Bible? Is it the spiritual principles of the Bible? Is it Paul's thoughts on head coverings or eating meat? Is 'the Word' a reference to Jesus? Or the Spirit? Does it have special powers? And if so, what are they? And what

precisely is its relationship to the Bible, Christ, and his followers? Today we are usually taught that the 'word' is the Bible. But those in the first century had a much more specific notion of 'the word'. Their notion was *the New Covenant* (Christ and the Law of Christ). It was *a message of godliness* through a spirit (God), a man (Jesus), his circumstances (the cross), and a new and all-encompassing spiritual instruction (God's new commandment).

3. What is the purpose of the New Testament? When we equate the Bible with 'the word', we naturally think of it as some sort of God-given 'manual for life'. But this was *not* the purpose of those first-century authors. Their purposes were in alignment with *teaching Christ* and *the New Covenant* – specifically recording the history of Jesus and the church and encouraging the church in discipleship. They were not writing to create some sort of new written standard. They were writing to edify the church and point people back to Christ – the ultimate standard.

These barriers have effectively caused us to value the Bible (and our interpretations of it) more than God's New Covenant. The Bible is good and useful when we use it to pursue godliness (submitting ourselves to the New Covenant), for it is instructive of many of the principles of the Creator. But it was not written to *be* God's perfect message or revelation; it was written to teach us *about* God's perfect message/revelation – Christ.

These three modern barriers have worked in tandem to diminish God's all-encompassing *Christ-in-man solution*. They have hidden this life-changing message of Christ through our religious training and interpretations. And they have effectively diverted our attention from this *growth in godliness* and placed it upon study, worship, traditions, and other peripheral concepts. While all of these notions are useful, they need to be understood in context: the central importance of the *New Covenant* – the Law of Christ and the church's promise to *abide and grow in Christ.*

This book is simply my own personal attempt to get past today's Christian dogmas. It is about sorting out my education and thoughts regarding this amazing first-century faith. Ultimately, this book is about bypassing today's religious paradigms through connecting ourselves to that original 'faith' (Jesus' transformational New Covenant). Over the decades I have tried my very best to uncover the faith of those first believers – those who gave up everything to share that message of Christ. To that end, I've tried to put my thoughts down as clearly as I could so that they could be understood by anyone who read this book.

To help you in understanding the faith of first-century Christians, I've designed the book as a series of brief, easy to digest lessons to help tackle the barriers I noted above. The first part of this book (Lessons 1–18) is about understanding the New Covenant of Christ-likeness from a first-century perspective. This is the new agreement that God revealed *in* and *through* the man Jesus. It will explain *why* the entire New Testament is pointing the readers back to the person/spirit of Jesus. And it will explain how he is the source and centerpiece of this new *Way* of being in the world.

The second part (Lessons 19–26) will be geared toward understanding the pre-New Testament "Word" (or *logos*). This section will help us see "the Word" that the early church understood, meditated upon, and strove to apply to their lives. The value of this section is immeasurable as

the contemplation and application of the Word will help us replace our religiosity with the purpose/spirit of this powerful man who willingly walks toward his destruction.

The final part (Lessons 27–30) is about understanding the *purpose* of the New Testament letters. In it, we will consider the reasons the authors write, and compare that with today's thoughts about the New Testament. Here we will discover that their real purpose is not the creation of a new written standard (i.e. New Testament), but rather is the 'knowledge of Christ' – the growing of believers in Jesus' spiritual likeness.

All three of these sections are really about lifting the fog so that we can focus on the ultimate spiritual goal – Christ-in-mankind ('likeness'). While much more could be included in each of these sections, my goal for this work is simple. It is to teach and encourage *God's purpose*, for I cannot see anything more meaningful than the building up of ourselves (and each other) in His perfect likeness.

> "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." - John 10:10b NASB

This message of 'Christ' (God 'likeness') encapsulates my hopes for the world. I am convinced that God is truly good, and that Jesus came to reveal and deliver the *abundant life* that our Creator intended. What would happen if we truly committed ourselves to understanding this spiritual walk of this man from Nazareth? What would become of our relationships? Our families? Our communities? Our nations? What could possibly be of more value than understanding this man's walk to the cross?

I am the way, and the truth, and the life;
no one comes to the Father but through Me.
– John 14:6 NASB

Part 1: The Covenant of Likeness

What did "following Christ" mean to those in the first century? Did they have a particular code of conduct? Did they have a set of rules or laws that they were to obey?

What did it mean to be an active member of *the Way*? Was it figuring out Jesus' parables? Was it following the Holy Spirit? Or living as Jesus lived? And what precisely do any of these things really mean?

In this first part, we will enter the first-century context to explore the all-encompassing nature of covenants. Here we will briefly summarize the events on Mount Sinai for the purposes of understanding the mindset that permeated Israel and its subsequent generations. This will help us grasp the New Covenant that was set forth by Jesus and then followed and taught by His disciples.

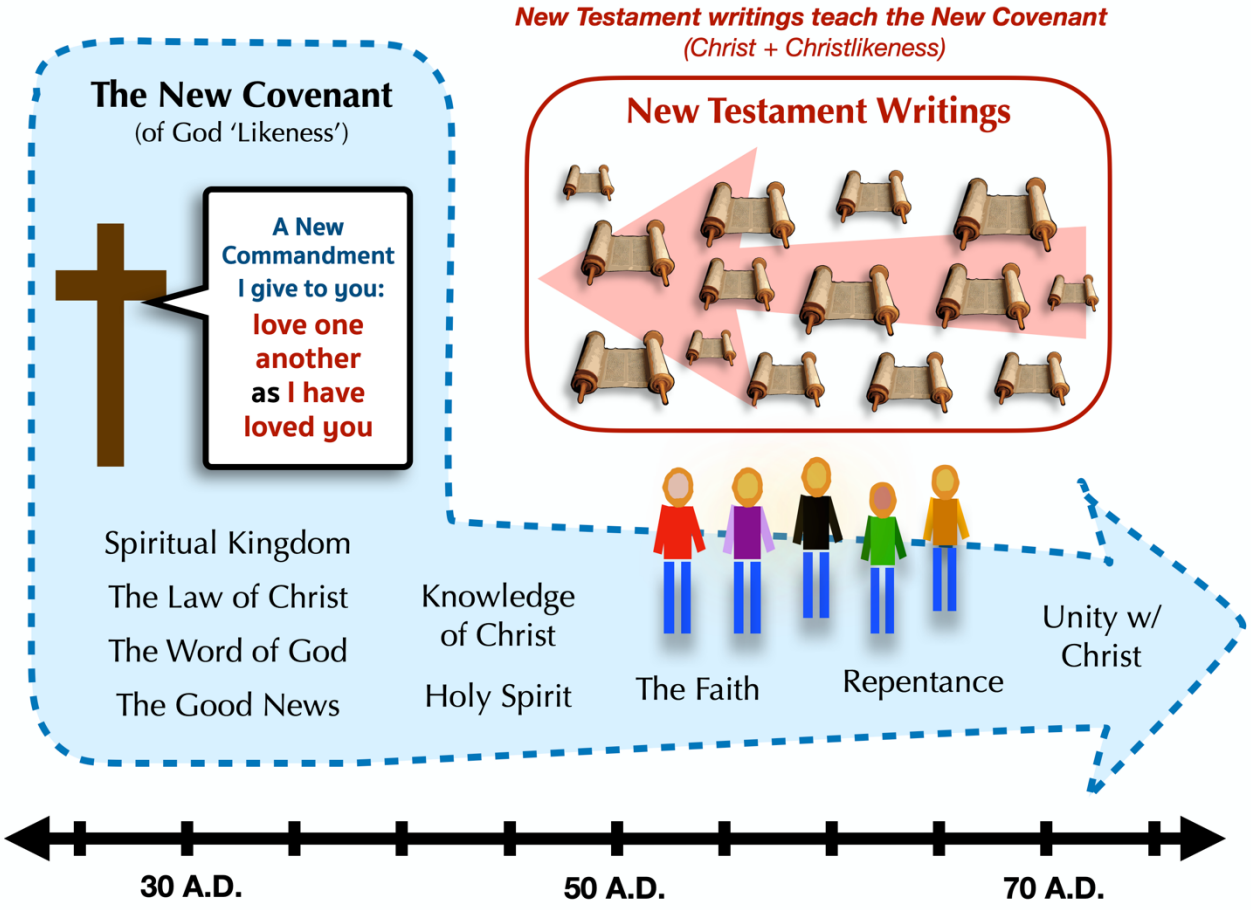
Understanding *the New Covenant of Christ* will bring clarity and simplicity to the Scriptures and their ultimate purpose of godliness. In particular, it will help us understand…

1. Why the early church was called 'the Way'.
2. How Jesus (rather than a set of writings) was *the source* for 'faith'.
3. Why the apostles were so willing to give up their lives for their faith.
4. Why the apostles describe Christ as a sort of spiritual medium (i.e. why they use phrases like "*in* Christ," "*through* Christ," and "*by* Christ" so frequently).
5. Why *edification in Christ* (Christ-likeness) was so significant to the apostles.
6. Why there is such little emphasis upon traditions or a set of rules in the New Testament.

Pre-New Testament Faith

(Ch.1)

What was the Early Church Perspective of 'Following Christ'?



Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." —Luke 17:20-21 ESV

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. —Philippians 3:8-11 ESV

For I decided to know nothing among you
except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
– 1 Corinthians 2:2 ESV

1. Pre-New Testament Faith

What was Christianity like prior to the New Testament writings? What was their faith founded upon? Did they have a mission statement? Or an over-arching principle? If so, what was it?

The foremost thing we must understand is that the New Testament did ***not*** create first-century Christianity. Rather, the biographies and letters that make up our New Testament are *products* and *evidence* of that first-century faith. Those writings were written to teach and encourage a pre-existent faith. In other words, those who received the New Testament letters – the church – already understood the basics of 'Christianity'. These notions would include:

a) Who Christ is and what he accomplished at the cross;
b) The message (word) of Christ;
c) The purpose of the church;
d) What it means to 'follow Christ' (New Covenant); and
e) Basic 'Christian' terminology (the faith, the word, and the Law of Christ).

By the time the first letters of the New Testament were written, Christianity had been growing and developing for at least 15 years. Pentecost (circa 31 AD), where the first sermon of Peter was given at the temple, occurred decades *prior* to the writings we now call the 'New Testament' (47–97 AD). So when Christian communities eventually did gain access to these writings, much of what was in them wasn't news to them, as they already knew about Jesus and what it meant to follow Him. The primary purpose of these writings was not to codify doctrine and tradition, but rather *to encourage* believers.[1]

Today we often use those letters as our source for truth and knowledge. We teach them as "God's Word" and filter everything through our knowledge of those letters. But for the first believers, "the faith" and "the word" *already existed* when those letters were written. So on what did these first believers then ground their faith and practice?

> …yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him;
> and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we live through him.
> – 1 Corinthians 8:6 WEB

For the Apostle Paul, Jesus Christ was *the source* and *the centerpiece* of this new faith. Everything flowed from God, through Jesus, to humanity. He refers to Jesus as the source for righteousness, power, wisdom, truth, and knowledge.[2] In some manner Christ is even our purpose:

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created in the heavens and on the earth, visible things and invisible

[1] This will be explained in more detail in part 3.
[2] Rom. 3:21; 1 Cor. 1:24; Eph. 4:21; Col. 2:3.

> things, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things have been created through him and for him. – Colossians 1:15-16 WEB

For those earliest messengers Christ was everything and the conduit for *everything* they needed:

> He said to me, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son." – Revelation 21:6-7 WEB

He was the key to all things pertaining to life and godliness. *He was their solution* – which explains why virtually every passage in the New Testament is directing the reader's attention back to the person and spirit of Jesus.

A Faith of Likeness

Today our attention is divided. Our *source* for our faith is usually some mixture of the Bible, Jesus, traditions, and a few vague notions of the Holy Spirit. But for those in the first century, Jesus was the impetus and purpose for *everything.* His spirit (or 'likeness') is the reason and force behind all of Christianity. He was quite literally everything to those earliest believers.

More specifically, for those first-century followers, Jesus was both the centerpiece and filter for this new *faith*. He was their impetus for belief and their source for godliness. He was not just a good teacher. His spiritual likeness was their actual *covenant with God* – an agreement that is simply a commitment to understanding and growing in Jesus' 'likeness' – the following of God's New Commandment:

> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. – John 13:34-35 WEB

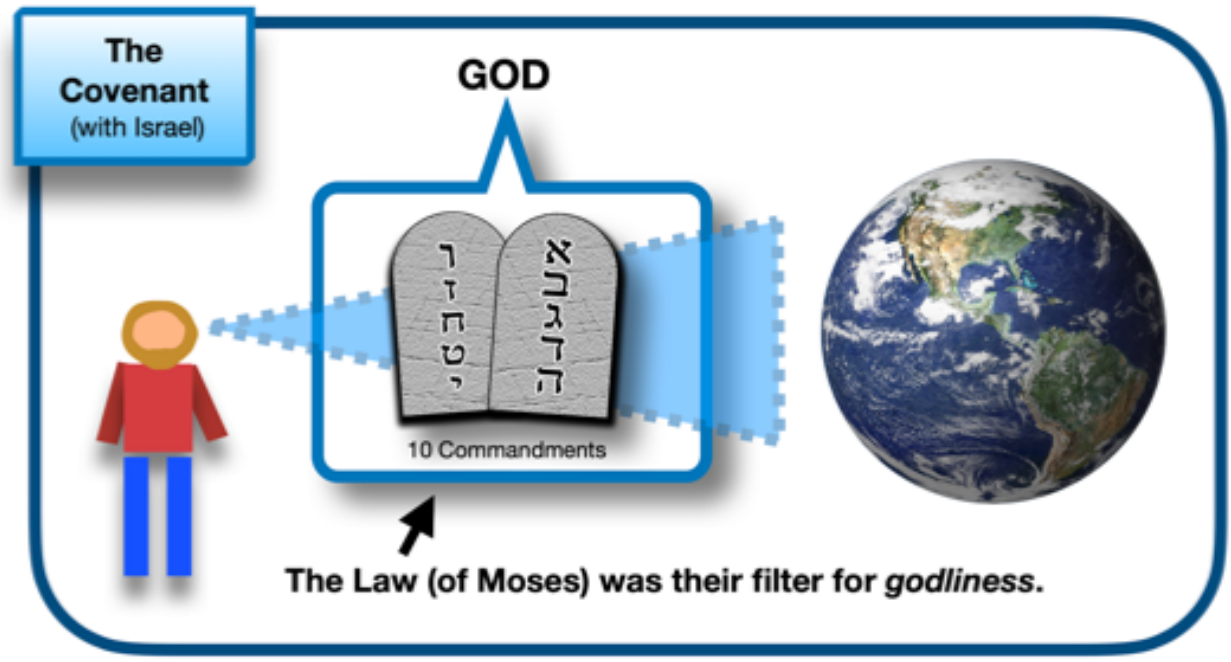
This is the reason *the Spirit* was their linchpin to godliness. It frankly is the *application of God's love and Spirit* in the world. It is a revelation of our humanity and divinity – the uncovering of our spiritual design. Through Jesus, God is revealing critical information about our essence and mission. He is unveiling our capacity and potential for love, strength, joy, peace, and humility.

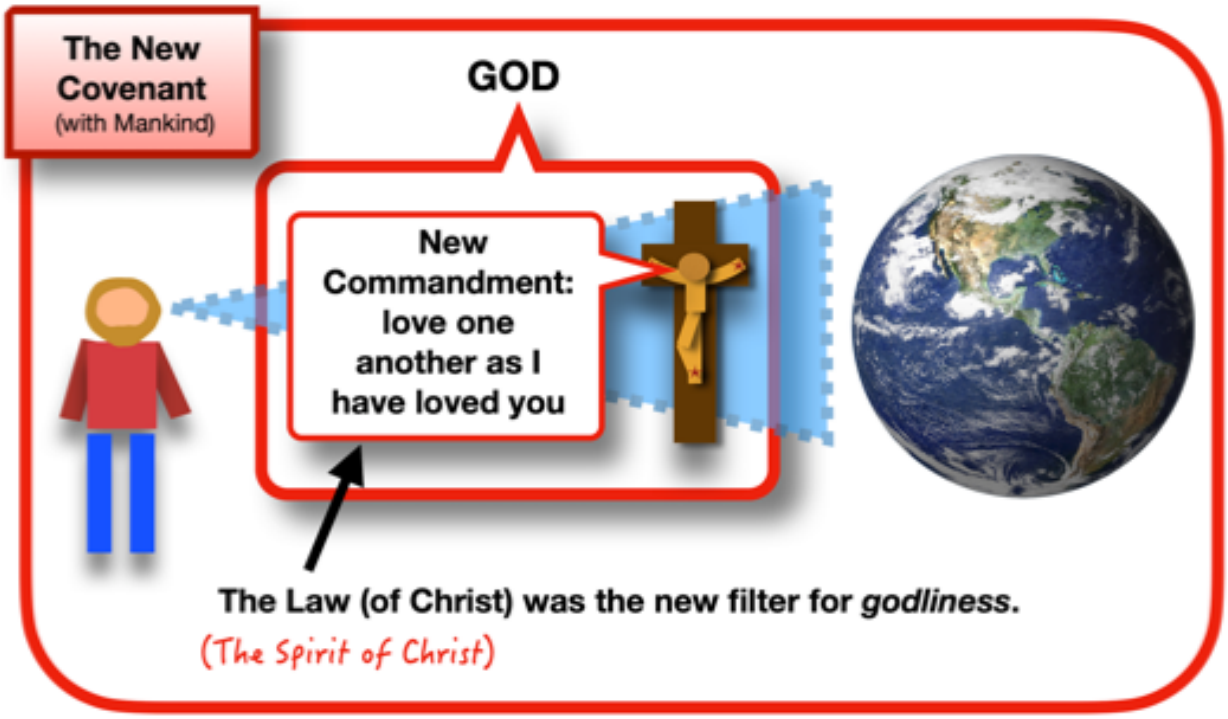
In this new commandment, Jesus is effectively unveiling our real selves – the Truth – the purpose of all things. It is no exaggeration to say that through this new commandment Jesus offers us God's overarching purpose for everything. This 'likeness' was the purpose of the New Testament letters. This was the mission of the New Testament authors and the purpose of their specific instructions, which was drawing their readers back to Christ and his spiritual 'likeness'.

Think About It… If Jesus had a 'theology', what would it be? Would it be a theology based upon a set of works? Would it be rooted in a set of traditions or a particular rulebook? Would it be buried in a set of educated abstractions? Or scholarly verbiage? Or would his 'theology' simply be himself – his spiritual likeness – the spiritual 'likeness' that is *one with the Creator*?

God's New Covenant

A Covenant of Transformation





Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from **God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.** —2 Corinthians 3:5-6 ESV

in Christ Jesus has set you free
from the law of sin and of death.
– Romans 8:2 NASB

2. God's New Covenant

In order to gain clarity regarding first-century Christianity encapsulated in the New Covenant instituted by Jesus, it will be useful to understand the 'old' covenant – the covenant God made with the people of Israel. Here are a few important concepts that will help us consider that early context (and therefore what was *new* in the 'New Covenant'):

1) Judaism was founded by Moses (at Mount Sinai);
2) God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (the Law of Moses);
3) The Law was engraved on stone tablets by God's finger (Ex. 31:18);
4) A covenant was created through one's *promises* (to *be* a particular kind of person);
5) The tribes of Israel made a promise *to obey* the Law of Moses (Ex. 24:7-8); and
6) The covenant was ratified and consecrated by a blood sacrifice (Ex. 24:1-8).

There are a couple of other important features of the Jewish belief system at this time:

7) Jeremiah had prophesied that there would be a "New Covenant" and that it would be "written on their hearts" by God Himself (Jer. 31:31-34); and
8) Most Jews were expecting a new age (kingdom) to be ushered in by a Messiah and Israel to be restored to its former status as a glorious sovereign kingdom.

They had a deep reverence for the commandments of God and centered their lives around obedience to those commandments. This cannot be overstated. The Christian faith was seeded within Judaism. It sprouted among people whose lives were centered around keeping the laws of God – the Covenant. They understood that *righteousness* came from *obedience to His laws.* And they knew the promise that Israel had made after receiving the Law of Moses:

> Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "<u>All that the LORD has spoken we will do</u>, <u>and we will be obedient</u>." – Exodus 24:7 ESV

This set of laws – the Ten Commandments – was to be the filter for seeing the world and their means for determining right and wrong. It effectively was their 'decision-making apparatus' for godliness. So when Jesus gives them a 'new covenant', he is effectively proclaiming a new system or 'apparatus' for determining 'godliness'.

What was that 'new system'? It was a new rule, a new standard, a new set of expectations. It was a new way of looking at everything (e.g. the world, life, ourselves…). What was that expectation? It was godliness *through* Christ. It was godliness *through* this new commandment. This was God (through the human – Jesus) inserting His 'likeness' into the center of their decision-making apparatus. This 'likeness' (the Spirit of God) is now their filter for everything. And Jesus' spiritual likeness is now *the Way* back to God (and godliness) for everyone who wants to be a child of God.

This 'New Covenant' was not just a theological abstraction. It was the practical application of this 'new commandment' – the application of godliness that comes from honestly comparing

oneself to this one powerful and godly man – a man who willingly and lovingly walks to his destruction. F*or through his crucifixion* and *God's New Commandment* Jesus is revealing:

a) *The measure of God's love for humanity, and*
b) *The love/spiritual likeness God would have for humanity.*

It wasn't a religion or a set of rules. It was a walk – a straightforward commandment to *put on God's spiritual likeness* – a likeness that was revealed by Jesus. It was the contemplation of the love it takes to go to the cross, and then putting it into practice. An expectation (faith) that could only be understood through a knowledge of Jesus' spirit and the cross.

> This is my commandment, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. – John 15:12-13 WEB

This New Covenant was more than a new agreement with God. It was God calling humanity back to himself, through himself – through His 'likeness' – a likeness that was perfectly revealed through nails and a tree.

Without this New Covenant and this New Commandment, there would be no new standard and the *Law of Moses* would still be in effect. This New Covenant sealed the spirit of Jesus (the 'likeness' of God) as the source and centerpiece of their faith. It truly made Jesus their spiritual Lord and King.

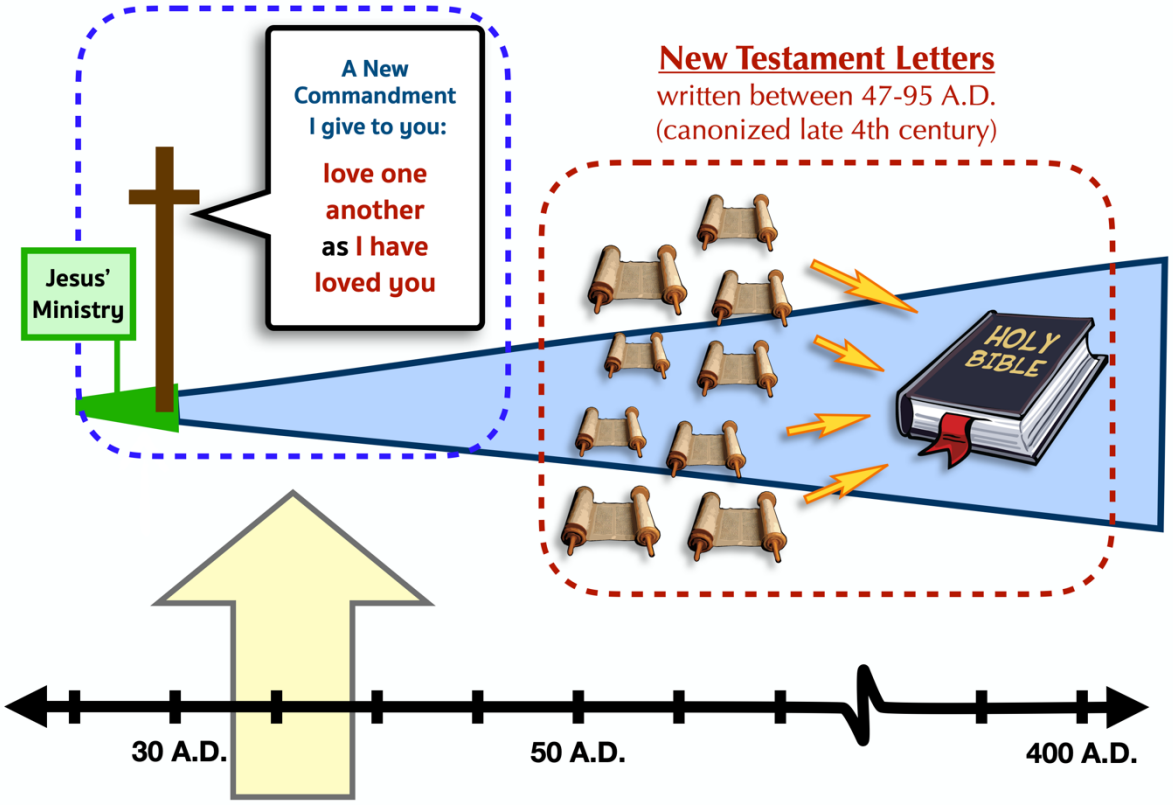
Think About It… This New Covenant was God (through Christ) leading Jesus's followers into a new self and a new world. This new doctrine was an internal compass that always pointed them toward God's immeasurable love – a love that would transform and change anyone who dared to comprehend it. What does the New Covenant (Jesus, the cross, and the New Commandment) say about…

1. The love God has for humanity?
2. The love He wants us to have?
3. The spirit God would have for mankind?
4. The humility, courage, and strength God would have for us?

The Law of Christ

(Ch.3)

the Forgotten Way of the Early Church



'The Way' of the Lord (= abiding in the New Covenant)

1. Instituted by Jesus
2. Revealed by Jesus
3. Defined by Jesus
4. Authored by Jesus
5. Finished by Jesus
6. Is Christ Jesus himself
7. Is discipleship into Christ
8. Is abiding in Christ
9. Is the Spirit of Christ
10. Is following God's New Commandment
11. Is to be written on our hearts
12. Is dependent upon 'knowledge of Christ's Spirit'
13. Is God's purpose for mankind
14. Is the emphasis of the New Testament

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. - Philippians 3:8-11 ESV

Bear one another's burdens,
and so fulfill the law of Christ.
– Galatians 6:2 WEB

3. The Law of Christ

For a Jew, *the Law of God* is a beautiful thing. It is the ultimate source of wisdom, strength, and comfort. It is a direct communication from God, and the means for understanding who He would have us be. It is not a suggestion or preference. It is the Almighty communicating righteousness to His children.

> But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. – Psalm 1:2-3 NASB

This new law that Christ brings is perfect and complete, as it is simply pure godliness. It is not encumbered by lists or rituals or rules. It is simply placing one's attention upon the Law of Christ-likeness – the perfect law of liberty.

> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. – James 1:25 ESV

This was not a hidden or obscure law. This was the definition of Christianity. This was the identifying mark of a follower of Jesus.

> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. – John 13:34-35 WEB

It was a commandment that was understood by his followers. It was a commandment that was *according* to godliness and righteousness. It was an instruction that had been hidden throughout the ages and could only truly be revealed through a God-like entity.

> Now to him who is able to establish you according to my Good News and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret through long ages, but now is revealed, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known for obedience of faith to all the nations. – Romans 14:24-25 WEB

It was a commandment of God's Spirit and for our spirits. It was a commandment of spiritual life in Christ Jesus.

This new *Law of Christ-likeness* is not just 'Good News' – it is the greatest news of all time, for it is a return to godliness through the perfect revelation of 'Spirit' (Jesus himself). It is God's Spirit increasing in humanity (through their knowledge of Jesus). It is a reconnection with the

Creator through His infinite love and power. And the pouring out of that love and power upon humanity.

This New Covenant is a directive that goes beyond the structures of the mind. It is a commandment that points our hearts *directly* at the Father's heart. It is alignment with His purposes and values. It is God's love and strength being fostered within us. It is our loving Father preparing His children for *any* circumstance and facing *any* challenge with the love and peace of Christ. It is simply God (through Christ Jesus) breathing life into His children.

This new 'way' is God's spiritual deposit of Heaven itself. It is mankind walking with the purpose of both God and Jesus. It is a love that is 'of God' and 'for humanity' – a love that fulfills the Law.

> For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement,* "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." – Galatians 5:14 NASB

And the love that somehow explains the entirety of the Law and the Prophets:

> One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question*,* testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'" On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets. – Matthew 22:35-40 NASB

There is no greater commandment than what Jesus set forth at the Passover. There can be no 'newer' or 'greater' law, for Christ is the pinnacle and purpose of humanity. He is our destination and our home. And abiding in his Law (His 'likeness') is abiding in godliness itself.

Think about it… If an all-powerful and all-loving Being wanted to center man's attention upon godliness, how would He do it? How might He effectively convey godliness? How would he "explain" the spiritual qualities (or God 'likeness') that mankind has forgotten?