**A close up of a logo

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NEW COVENANT PARENTING

DR. JOE LANGLEY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

New Covenant Parenting – Dr. Joe Langley

**Session 1**

* Three spiritual futures
* Self-achieved righteousness
* The actual purpose of the Law
* The difference in the two covenants

**Session 2**

* Parents understanding
* Grace attitude survey
* Parental rules
* Quiz
* Reference Material

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NEW COVENANT PARENTING

Session 1

**Three Spiritual Futures**

A child is headed towards one of three spiritual futures.

He might go down the road of religion and rules where he feels that God’s opinion of him is based on his own attempts at righteousness.

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He might choose a second road where he has faith but feels that he needs to add his own performance into the equation.

Both of these roads lead to a life of questioning if he is good enough to be pleasing to God. There will be cycles of failures and rededications followed by more failures and more rededications.

Rules will continue to be added on top of the existing rules. Instead of realizing what Jesus has already done, the emphasis will be on what he is to do. And not do. And to do better. There will always be a better and there will always be a more.

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There is a third road. It is the road of God’s grace which is based solely on the work of Jesus. That road will be a life of a child experiencing Christ’s presence in his heart. It will be a life characterized by love, joy and peace.

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How can parents help a child choose the road of God’s grace?

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Central to the idea is for the parent to think about two questions. Parents need to consider,

“What does their child think about God?

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What does the child think God thinks about him?

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Data from Baylor studies show that 33% see God as an authoritative God who watches over the world in order to punish those who violate His rules. This God is very judgmental and very engaged.

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Approximately 25% see God as a distant God that set the universe in motion but has no further involvement with it after creation.

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Another 15% believe in a critical God who is not involved in our daily lives, but who will judge humans in an afterlife.

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As we analyze those responses, we see that almost half of Americans see God as a judgmental God. Another 25% see God as distant and removed.

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Approximately 5% of Americans are atheist, not believing in God at all.

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Add it all up and it means that less than 25% of Americans view God as loving, benevolent and involved. In other words, less than 25% believe in the God that Jesus talked about.

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If a child interacts with parents, grandparents, teachers and other children, then the odds are overwhelming that your child is hearing about a judgmental and critical God.

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Two additional pertinent questions:

Is the child learning the truth about grace at home?

Is the child learning that truth at church?

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Brain studies and child development research have identified the importance of the earliest years of life (0-5) to lifelong growth and development. It is in these formative years that growth and development are the most rapid.

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From a purely physiological sense, 85% of the brain is physically developed by age six. Lifelong personality traits are also instilled by age six.

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Young Americans today are dropping out of religion at a rate that is five to six times the historic rate. Surveys have discovered that 30 to 40 percent of young adults have no involvement in religion today, versus 5 to 10 percent just one generation ago.

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Approximately 70% of American youth drop out of church between the ages of 18 and 22. The Barna Group, a prominent evangelical Christian polling firm estimates that 80% of those reared in the church will be "disengaged" by the time they are age 29.

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Why do these young people drop out?

1. Some would hypothesize that the dropouts were never truly saved.
2. Others would suggest that there had been a true salvation experience earlier in life, but the dropouts decided to leave the church because they made a choice to live in sin. There is hope that they will “come to their senses” and return, but they may spend years living far from God.
3. Another theory is that they were turned off by the hypocrisy of their parents and other adults. Youth and young adults usually tend towards idealism, so perhaps they had minimal interest in belonging to an organization that seemed to them to be shallow and hypocritical.
4. Perhaps the most common answer for the behavior is that it is simply the expected rebellion against rules and authority. When youth get out from under their parents’ supervision, they enjoy the freedoms of being their own decision makers. They followed the rules as children and youth because they had to do so.

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Rules are not just ineffective when the parameters are removed; rules are ineffective because they do not work.

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They are hearing that God expects a certain behavior.

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They are being taught (either consciously or sub-consciously) to ask, “How do I measure up?”

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Children are learning that:

* God has a list of acceptable behaviors that will determine His Divine evaluation of their righteousness.
* They are being taught that one day they will stand before God and give an accounting for all they did or did not do.
* They are learning that good boys and good girls do certain things so that God will be happy with them.

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So, here are some additional pressing questions parents need to be asking:

• Is my child learning to feel guilt in his relationship with God?

• Is my child being taught that God’s love is at least partially conditional? Is that perspective being supported by the other adults influencing his/her belief system?

• Is my child learning that God expects and demands adherence to a list of rules and behaviors?

• Is my child learning that they are expected to achieve a level of righteousness?

• Is my child motivated by a fear of God?

• Is my child learning that he is to measure up?

• OR, Is my child developing a life-long relationship with God based upon an understanding of His grace?

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A simple definition has been based upon the letters of the word itself. Grace is God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense.

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Here’s the definition I used in my book, Unfiltered Grace.

“The full picture of grace cannot be contained in a simple definition. Grace is so much more than the amazing mercy of God extended to us at salvation. Grace is God doing for us what we cannot do ourselves. It is His Godness responding to our humanness. Grace is the way God has chosen to relate to us then, now and forever.

It describes the way God viewed us and loved us when we were His enemies in our minds; it is the way God operates in our daily lives and empowers us now; it is the way God judges us and forever looks at us through the perfect righteousness of Christ. Grace is about Jesus. It is about who He is. It is about what He did. It is about His finished work. It is about what He is doing. But it is not just about Jesus. Jesus is Grace.”

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**Self-achieved righteousness**

Self-achieved righteousness is not possible.

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Believers desire to have a right standing with God. They want to live righteous lives and they aspire to be judged by God as a righteous person. The question is, “How is that accomplished?”

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Religion offers an avenue based on rules and behavior.

Righteousness is primarily viewed as a godliness in living and a fulfillment of the tenets of a religion or a denomination. It is attained by adhering to a list of do’s and don’ts.

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Righteousness is not behavioral with all of its ups and downs.

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Righteousness is positional.

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Righteousness is a right standing with God. It is not an ethical or moral concept.

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Righteousness is not about how we do; it is about what Jesus has already done. It is not something we achieve; it is something we receive.

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**The Actual Purpose of the Law**

Many, if not most believers today, feel that the Law is a list of requirements for them to follow. They see the Law as a check list of what God desires and expects. It is seen as a measurement of how well they are following Christ.

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But that was not the purpose of the Law. How can we know that? We know the real purpose of the Law because the Bible clearly reveals it.

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In reality the Law has always had only one true purpose. God designed the Law to show us how desperately we need a Savior.

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**“Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”** (Galatians 3:21-25)

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The Law was never intended as a possible way to righteousness; it was designed to lead us to Christ.

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What is “law” today?

Law = performance that has the aim of impacting our standing with God.

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With near unanimous agreement, Christians today believe the focus of the Christian life is to manage and overcome sin.

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That focus is the heartbeat of religion. They believe that they are to control their sinning with their own resources and their own power.

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Sin is to be identified, isolated, stopped, confessed and overcome.

The success rate is 0%. Not 50%. Not 25%. 0%.

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The Grace Gospel takes an entirely different approach. It teaches that sin cannot be controlled nor managed even by our most dedicated efforts. It cannot be consistently overcome.

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Grace teaches that there is only one power over sin.

* That power does not come from us; it comes from God.
* He gives us a new nature to be lived out in a new relationship.
* The focus of Christian living is no longer about doing, but instead it is about being.
* It is not our works; it is His work.
* Sin is not overcome. Sin is defeated. Sin is nailed to the cross.

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**The Difference in the Two Covenants**

The New Covenant was also conditional, but there was a huge difference. Man was not responsible for holding up his end to the bargain. Jesus fulfilled it for us.

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Man was not part of the equation.

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The New Covenant was a covenant between God and Jesus. And they both held up their ends of the contract. All the conditions were fulfilled.

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Two covenants, both different, both diametrically opposed, and we are to follow both. This covenant confusion is the underlying reason for Christian living confusion.

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It is about our work and our doing. Sin demands sacrifice, but in most of today’s religions that expected sacrifice is not the sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats.

* Instead, it is the sacrifice of our emotional rededication.
* It is the sacrifice of time, effort and money.
* It is the sacrifice of confessing and asking God to forgive our sins.

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Covenant confusion is also caused by a misunderstanding of when the Old Covenant ended and when the New Covenant was placed into effect.

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It is forgotten that Jesus was born under the Law and taught under the Law.

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This misunderstanding causes much covenant confusion. The words of Jesus spoken to people living before the cross and before the installation of the New Covenant are presumed to be words for us today.

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Why don’t people catch it? Bible is clear.

* Cognitive dissonance.
* Not what they or their parents spent their life doing.
* I’ve discovered. People not steeped in church background catch it sooner.

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NEW COVENANT PARENTING

Session 2

**Parent’s Understanding**

* The parent must be in full agreement with the idea that God’s love is truly unconditional.
* The parent must agree that Christ’s sacrifice settled the issue of forgiveness once and for all.
* The parent must believe that Christ has made us holy and blameless in God’s sight.
* They must realize that Christians live under a new and different covenant.
* They must know that righteousness is a gift of God’s grace instead of a measurement of human effort.
* They must not be comfortable with the mixed grace message that is common in many messages being taught today.
* They must not think that as a parent of a small child, it is okay to focus on Law and works for a few years and then later start teaching a child about grace.

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**Grace Attitude Survey**

1) I am never scared of God.

2) God loves me no matter what.

3) God does not reward me because I am good and He does not punish me because I am bad.

4) God never gets disappointed with me.

5) God is proud of me even if I don’t always do the right things.

6) God doesn’t make bad things happen to me when I do something wrong.

7) God is always watching over me, but it is not because He wants to see if I am being good or bad. It’s because He cares for me and loves me.

8) God never gets mad at me and decides to stop answering my prayers.

9) God loves me the same when I am not so good as He loves me when I am good.

10) God loves me so much that Jesus died for my sin.

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0-3: The child has a significant misunderstanding of God’s grace. He is not certain of God’s unconditional love and acceptance. The child worries whether or not he is good enough in God’s eyes.

4-5: The child is uncertain of God’s love and grace. She has a partial understanding of God’s grace, but she also believes that His love is conditional and based upon her own goodness. Her contradictory responses reveal that her perspective is very uncertain.

6-7: The child knows God’s love is unconditional but is also comfortable mixing grace and works. He is developing the mindset that most Christians grow up to possess.

They believe in grace, but they do not fully understand or accept it. They believe in the unconditional love of God, but they still think that His love is conditioned upon them and their behavior.

8-9: The child understands God’s grace, but still needs full clarification and reinforcement of the aspects of that grace. Her knowledge of grace might still be primarily intellectual, but she is well on her way to understanding that God’s love is based upon Him rather than upon her.

10: The child understands that God always deals with him in grace. If this awareness is consistently reinforced, the child will have an understanding of unfiltered grace that will enable him to avoid teachings that mix grace and human works.

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While the Grace Attitude Survey is helpful in understanding what the child believes about God and His grace, it is perhaps even more helpful if it is repeated frequently.

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First, for the parents. How would you yourself respond to the ten statements in the survey?

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If a child attends a Sunday school, a Vacation Bible school or any other system of religious training, then this next question is vitally important: How would the child’s teacher answer this survey?

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**Parental rules**

Establishing rules is the best and most conventional way to guide your child's behavior. Children need to hear, and they need to be taught to appropriately respond to directions such as stop that and don't do that. That's just good common sense and that needs to be common parenting.

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The problem arises when this not only becomes true for rules of expected societal behaviors, but also readily carries over into rules of religious behaviors.

The problem comes when children think that God’s opinion of them is shaped by how well they obey His rules.

That is the heart of legalism.

Legalism is the belief that righteousness in God’s estimation is based upon human behavior. We are to do “this and this” and we are also told not to do “that and that.”

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The simplest definition: Legalism is having a legal list.

A belief system that God's opinion is based on how well that person follows and fulfills that list. Now parents should realize it should reinforce rules and boundaries for behavior. Children need to know that some behaviors are desirable, and some behaviors are unacceptable, but there's a danger. We have to outline those rules and boundaries without creating that God has a legal list of rules and boundaries for his approval. A parent must protect the child from that legalism. Because you see once instilled that legalism can become a lifelong hindrance to a child feeling God's love and acceptance. That child can grow into an adult that believes that God's opinion is shaped more by his own goodness and badness than by what God has done for them through Christ. His life will become an endless effort to please God. He might just give up. He certainly will not know the peace of resting in God's acceptance.

Why is a true picture of legalism so necessary? It is because legalism puts a child under a curse.

**“For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”** (Galatians 3:10)

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Rules should never be conditions of acceptance. If they are ever connected with acceptance, they have crossed over from parental direction into the cursed areas of legalism and conditional approval.

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How should a parent respond when that doesn’t occur? They will need to apply discipline.

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The word “discipline” shares the same root as the word “disciple.” It is interesting that “discipline” is often seen as negative while “discipling” is viewed as positive training. In many cases, “discipline” is associated with punishment. “Discipling” on the other hand is related to love and relationship.

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The English word “discipline” comes from the Greek word which means to instruct and nurture. It means to teach and train.

Discipline does not equal nor require punishment. The two words are sometimes used interchangeably, but they have a very significant difference.

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True discipline is never to be done in anger. It is done for the purpose of correction. Discipline does not equal harshness.

Discipline is a correction or training that seeks the positive results of character and self-control.

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Providing discipline and training without crossing any lines over into punishment and penalty is a difficult and precarious balance.

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Behavior should never be associated with rules for earning God’s acceptance. As we remember that a parent is given the role of discipling and of discipline, we must be careful not to communicate that obeying parents has a synonymous connection with obeying God and earning God's approval. Parents walk a very fine line here. Behavior should never be associated with rules for gaining God's Acceptance. The idea of discipline should never be set up to be opposed to the idea of love. It has to be linked with a unconditional love. The purpose of rules is to apply rules for safety, social success, and common decency. It should never be connected to child’s spiritual identity, and standing with God.

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**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.** (Galatians 5:22- 23, ESV)

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Grace has absolutely no element of earning involved with it. In fact, grace is the polar opposite of earning.

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A wage is deserved. It is given in exchange for an action. It is a payment. But a gift is given. It is the outcome of love and acceptance. A gift has no strings attached. A gift is the essence of grace.

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“Unconditional” means without any conditions.

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Just to clarify. What exactly is “unconditional” love? What is “conditional” love?” There’s a relatively simple test.

Anytime an “if” or a “when” is attached, it is not unconditional love.

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**11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.** (Titus 2:11-12, ESV)

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