

## **Quakerism and the New Covenant**

*from an interview with Ben Richmond*

Now I think of the Quaker movement as the fulfillment of the scripture in Jeremiah 31, which is repeated in Hebrews 8, which is the promise of the New Covenant. And there are three parts to that promise. I'll take them in reverse order. They are first, I'll forgive your sins, forgive your iniquities. And I've noticed that almost all Friends of whatever type, programmed or unprogrammed, emphasize that God is a God of love and that we always have the chance to have a fresh start. And we're very optimistic about the possibility of our relationship with God. And I think it's clearly based on an emphasis that we are always living in the grace of God, and everybody is. And God has just decided to do that on God's own.

The other two promises of the new covenant are "I will write my law on your heart," and "everyone will know me," says God. "You won't have to listen to the teaching of another person, but you'll know me yourself." And so, I think that, whether it's programmed Friends or unprogrammed Friends, we put a big emphasis on the possibility of knowing God directly as an interior experience, inwardly in our lives. And we expect and know that that's going to change us and give us the possibility of living lives that would conform to God's law. And law doesn't sound like a good thing, but I understand that to mean that we get to live the kind of life that God intended from the beginning of creation, a good kind of a life that would include peace and simplicity and equality among people and living in harmony with each other and being able to tell the truth, and things like that. But it happens from within because of God's inward presence amongst us and our sitting and waiting to experience that and to be open to that rather than as a matter of reading a bunch of rules, whether they're God's rules or the rules of the Quaker community, or whatever and trying to live up to them. I don't think that works. I think that living in openness to the inward presence of God works.

So that's what I think Quakerism is really about, and then we do all the different kinds of things that we do as a result of that. We have times of open worship so that we can experience that, and we do our business by the sense of the Meeting because we are really trying to listen to God. We're not trying to conform to the community.