

FREE FROM THE LAW

LIVING UNDER GRACE

Much of Christianity could be included in Paul's description of the believers at Galatia when he writes:

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Gal. 3:1)

The Galatians had begun with a clear understanding of the issues of grace and all that Christ had done for them at Calvary and the position God had given them in Christ. But they had become foolish – they allowed their thinking to wander from their completeness in Christ and thus allowed themselves to be bewitched into thinking their adherence to a set of external rules would enable them to please God. Thus Paul seeks to reason with them:

"This only would I learn of you, RECEIVED YE THE SPIRIT BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW, OR BY THE HEARING OF FAITH?"

"Are ye so foolish? HAVING BEGUN IN THE SPIRIT, ARE YE NOW MADE PERFECT BY THE FLESH?" (Gal. 3:2, 3)

Is the entrance into salvation by faith but the fullness of the Christian life by the works of the law? Hardly! It is vital to realize that grace is not only the way of salvation but it is also the key to the sustaining and successful Christian life. The alternative is for our lives to be "vain" – empty, fruitless and barren:

"Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain." (Gal. 3:4)

One of the major roadblocks on the road to spiritual growth is the unrealistic notion that the Christian life consists simply of mastering certain "principles," that if we successfully follow a list of steps and standards we will achieve spirituality.

Many honest souls cannot believe that obedience to God can be secured in any other way than by the law principle... by adherence to a set of external rules by which to obey and seek to please God.

The truth is, however, that no believer will be effective who sees his life as slavish servitude to a list of rules and regulations. Rather, we will be motivated to godly living and faithful service when we see ourselves not as serving the law but responding to grace.

Rom. 6:14 is an important verse here. Although it is familiar and often quoted, it is amazing how little genuine understanding exists as to its real meaning:

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

The first "for" states the fact that sin's lordship over us is ended. The second reveals the basis on which this release is realized in our lives: We are not under the law – not under a performance system that first demands duty and then offers blessing. Rather we are under grace – which freely gives the blessing first, knowing that the blessing will cause fruit to follow naturally.

It is important to understand that grace frees us from both sin and the law.

FREE FROM THE LAW

Gal. 4:1, 2 demonstrate the two-fold use of law:

“Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But IS UNDER TUTORS AND GOVERNORS until the time appointed of the father.”

A “tutor” is one who teaches, while a “governor” is one who is to control, restrict and restrain. These are two basic functions of law: to stop or control sin and/or to teach how to bring forth fruit that would be acceptable to the justice of God.

To thus use the law, however, only demonstrates our own inadequacy, for the problem with the law is really the problem with us; it points out our inability. As Rom. 8:3 reminds us:

“...WHAT THE LAW COULD NOT DO, IN THAT IT WAS WEAK THROUGH THE FLESH,...”

The only answer to the condemnation of the law is to deal with sin by some other means.

The law can never stop sin in our lives simple because sin is there. Rather the law makes sin active and alive for “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3:20) Thus, Rom. 7 tells us:

“For when we were in the flesh, THE MOTIONS OF SINS, WHICH WERE BY THE LAW, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.”

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I HAD NOT KNOWN SIN, BUT BY THE LAW: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”

“But SIN, TAKING OCCASION BY THE COMMANDMENT, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. FOR WITHOUT THE LAW SIN WAS DEAD.”

“For I WAS ALIVE WITHOUT THE LAW ONCE: BUT WHEN THE COMMANDMENT CAME, SIN REVIVED, AND I DIED.”

“And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.”

“For SIN, TAKING OCCASION BY THE COMMANDMENT, DECEIVED ME, AND BY IT SLEW ME.”

“For we know that THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL: BUT I AM CARNAL, SOLD UNDER SIN.”
(Rom. 7:5, 7-11, 14)

It is our identification with Christ at Calvary that frees us from sin. In Rom. 6, our freedom from sin is based squarely on the fact that we have been crucified with Christ:

“Knowing this, that OUR OLD MAN IS CRUCIFIED WITH HIM [CHRIST], THAT THE BODY OF SIN MIGHT BE DESTROYED, THAT HENCEFORTH WE SHOULD NOT SERVE SIN.”

“FOR HE THAT IS DEAD IS FREED FROM SIN.” (Rom. 6:6, 7)

In Rom. 7, we learn that this same identification with Christ at Calvary has also made us free from the law:

“Wherefore, my brethren, YE ALSO ARE BECOME DEAD TO THE LAW by the body of Christ...”

“BUT NOW WE ARE DELIVERED FROM THE LAW, THAT BEING DEAD WHEREIN WE WERE HELD; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.” (Rom. 7:4a, 6)

To be “free from the law” means that Christ has delivered us from trying to “be good” in order to be accepted by God. No longer is it necessary to be under external enactments, under conditions of performance and duty. “In Christ” we already have an eternal standing in grace; we have already secured Divine favor, by a sovereign act of God which has not only reckoned to us Christ’s redeeming work but has placed us fully in His present acceptance with God!

This deliverance from the law gives us liberty from sin’s dominion in the details of our lives. The relationship between sin and the law is explained in 1 Cor. 15:56,

“...THE STRENGTH OF SIN IS THE LAW.”

Our problem all along has been sin – and the law points out sin on its every occurrence, thus condemning us. Having been made free from sin through the cross work of Christ, however, the law has lost its job, as it were. Thus the cross also makes us free from the law:

“BLOTTING OUT THE HANDWRITING OF ORDINANCES THAT WAS AGAINST US, WHICH WAS CONTRARY TO US, AND TOOK IT OUT OF THE WAY, NAILING IT TO HIS CROSS;” (Col. 2:14)

Since the cross has so effectively dealt with sin, should we then use the law for its other purpose – to motivate us to live in a godly manner? Let’s see.

LIVING UNDER GRACE

Paul declares that it is grace that teaches and motivates the believer today to “maintain good works.”

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,”

“TEACHING US THAT, DENYING UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY LUSTS, WE SHOULD LIVE SOBERLY, RIGHTEOUSLY, AND GODLY, in this present world;” (Tit. 2:11, 12)

Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness – to stop sin in our lives and to live soberly, righteously and godly – to bring forth fruit that will please God.

Paul says, “...by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10), and we need to discover in our lives what this means. It is grace that produces results, whereas law-keeping makes only for frustration. The gospel of the grace of God liberates us into a life of service for Christ and if it were truly understood it would electrify present-day Christianity. The problem of our present time is that the Church preaches a message that is little more than warmed-over Judaism rather than the liberty that comes from faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Let’s understand this clearly: The Christian life is not earning credits and blessings from the Lord. Instead, it is the grateful response to what He has already done for us in that He has given us everything in Christ. Rom. 8:32 sets forth our confidence:

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, HOW SHALL HE NOT WITH HIM ALSO FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS?”

The little word “for” in the middle of Rom. 6:14 is intriguing. We believe both parts of the verse but why this “for”? The answer is the key to the Christian life: for the believer, being under grace brings about what all his legal efforts could never attain. Thus, it is all-important to discern what it means to be “under grace.”

The answer is repeated over and over in Paul’s epistles: it is discovering that we have everything in Christ, believing it and resting in it.

We must never believe that these truths are merely abstract doctrines that have no relevance to our lives. The motivation for the marvelous ministry committed to our trust grows out of the great joy that comes when the truths of grace grip the heart. A clear understanding of and confidence in the grace of God is the only way to success.

GRACE WORKS

Grace is not against good works! It simply does not bless on the basis of good works. We receive blessing from God based solely on the merits of His Son... blessings freely given to us in Christ and nowhere else. The completeness that is in Christ means deliverance from trying to “be good” and “do right” in order to be accepted by God.

Never think for a moment, however, that good works are not important to grace. We must learn that grace is God’s way both in salvation and the Christian life. It is the *modus operandi* for the Christian life. The good works the law demanded; grace produces.

The law demands good works and uses its terror – fear of punishment, rejection, shame, unanswered prayer, personal tragedy, etc. – as motivation. Here performance is a necessity to secure the blessings and avoid the curses.

Grace, on the other hand, allows us to serve on a different basis – not from fear but on the basis of love and gratitude, from appreciation and gladness for blessings freely given and freely received.

This is the fundamental difference between the way law and grace produce results: the reason for doing the good works under law is different from the reason for doing them under grace. Two familiar passages well illustrate this:

Consider first, Matt. 6:14, 15:

“For IF YE FORGIVE men their trespasses, YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER WILL ALSO FORGIVE YOU:”

“But IF YE FORGIVE NOT men their trespasses, NEITHER WILL YOUR FATHER FORGIVE YOUR TRESPASSES.”

The motivation to perform the good work of forgiving others is quite clear: *If* a person forgives others, then they will also be forgiven. *If not* – then there is no forgiveness for them. This is the law principle and its motivation.

Now contrast this with Eph. 4:31-32:

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:”

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS GOD FOR CHRIST’S SAKE HATH FORGIVEN YOU.”

This is the program of grace—we do the same good work but for a different reason. Rather than being against good works, grace motivates and produces good works—but it produces them for a different reason than the law does.

Under grace, we serve simply as the natural response of who we are in Christ. Are we to forgive one another because they perform up to our expectations – because they confess their wrong or make restitution? No. We forgive because by faith we are free to live consistently with who we are in Christ, simply out of gratitude.

As we rejoice in an understanding of how God values and esteems us in Christ, that understanding will motivate us to serve one another. Gal. 5:13, 14 instruct us:

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but BY LOVE SERVE ONE ANOTHER.”

“FOR ALL THE LAW IS FULFILLED IN ONE WORD, EVEN IN THIS; THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF.”

Thus, as we live “under grace,” we are able to produce the very good works that the law demanded but which we were not able to accomplish under that system. (Gal. 3:10)

A knowledge of the love of God so clearly demonstrated for us in Christ, is His powerful motivation to encourage us to godly living and faithful service. It is the love of Christ that constrains us – not our love for Him, but His love for us. This is the motive of gratitude and appreciation. Our lives are lived simply as a “thank you” in response to God’s unspeakable gift.

Sometime ago the writer witnessed an illustration of the power of love to motivate which all can understand: On the TV screen was a burning house. A young mother was in the front yard while her two small children were on the second floor, which was consumed with fire and smoke. Two big firemen were trying to restrain the little mother as she struggled to break free from them.

Finally, in a burst of energy, she escaped their grip and ran into the flaming house to her death. While newsmen asked the TV camera, “Why did she do such a thing?” Everyone viewing knew the answer.

Was it some city ordinance requiring parents to care for their children that sent that mother into the flames? Hardly! Rather it was a motivation that simply would not be denied – a mother’s love. There is no other motivation like it – except the love of Christ. Thus, Paul declares that, “the love of Christ constraineth us.” (2 Cor. 5:14)

Knowledge of God’s love for us in Christ is His powerful motivation to encourage us to present our bodies as living sacrifices. To view Rom. 12:1, 2 as a command is utterly wrong. It is to make a law of grace. Paul beseeches by the “mercies of God,” which will bring about a submissive heart. Vows cannot obtain this. Even if they could, the sacrifice would not be acceptable to God, for “though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” (1 Cor. 13:3)

How can this powerful motivation of love be produced in our lives? Paul has told us, “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” (Rom. 5:5) The Holy Spirit and the Word of God always go together. It is as we look into the Word of God and learn the details of all that has been accomplished in Christ that we can rest by faith in God’s amazing grace. It is our faith resting in the facts of Calvary that allows the Holy Spirit to empower those truths to transform our lives, thus the word of God “works effectually in you that believe.”

The Church will realize the greatness of its potential when it discovers not new methods but the message it professes to believe. It is grace that sets us free from the frustration of the performance system of the law.

We are made capable in our service for Christ in our own right when we see ourselves as children of God, set free from the bondage of the law and brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God – this by understanding His grace.

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