

The Law of Grace

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THE other day, an acquaintance of mine mentioned a “law of grace,” implying that this was the “new law” for Christians, and that it was somehow different from God’s moral law of ten commandments.

There is a difference, of course, between the law written on stone, or on stony hearts, and the law written in a new heart, by the Spirit of God,¹ but it is not a difference in what is written: God’s righteousness does not change, for it is His very life, and the Lord “changes not.”² Let us reason this out from the Scriptures.

The Righteousness of the Law

God’s moral law is the sum of all righteousness:

Psalm 119

⁹⁶ I have seen an end of all perfection: but your commandment is exceeding broad.

Psalm 19

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

⁸ The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

¹ 2 Corinthians 3:3.

² Malachi 3:6.

Romans 7

¹² Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

The Law is even the definition of God's will:

Isaiah 40

⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God: yea, your law is within my heart.

When God spoke prophetically of His "servant," which primarily refers to Jesus Christ, and secondarily to His children, He said,

Isaiah 42

²¹ The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will magnify the law, and make it honorable.

This was not some kind of "new law," but was the same ten commandment law that had been delivered on Sinai, for Jesus said,

Matthew 5

¹⁷ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

He then went on to explain some of those commandments, "You shall not kill," "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not swear" (take the Lord's name in vain), and so on.

Christ Kept the Law

Christ is specifically marked out as the one man on Earth who kept God's law:

John 15

¹⁰ I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love.

The Law defines what sin is:

1 John 3

⁴ Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

But Christ was "free from sin":

John 8

⁴⁶ Which of you convinces me of sin?

Hebrews 4

¹⁵ We have...a high priest which...was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 7

²⁶ For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.

Jesus showed what it really meant to keep God's law. His obedience was distinctly different from that of the average Jewish synagogue member, and especially different from the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. By this we see that men had a way of "keeping the Law" that was not at all God's way of "keeping the Law." With men, it was an outward show that counted. With God, it was the inner man in the heart.

The Law and the Gospel

The question then is, what is the purpose of the gospel? Is it some kind of alternative to the law? Paul asks this question in *Galatians*:

Galatians 3

¹⁹ Wherefore then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made...

²¹ Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

So the Law, in its form of ten commandments written on stone, or written on stony hearts, could not give life. The only kind of righteousness that God really recognizes is "living" righteousness. It is as if we have a book, describing what an Apple Tree looks like and what kind of fruit it produces. That book would be like the written law. But it cannot produce an Apple Tree; we cannot plant the book, expecting an apple tree!

We might take that book, and copy it's descriptions to try and form an Apple Tree. We take a wild bush, and start to trim its leaves to look like apple leaves, we glue on round balls, painted red to look like apples, and so on. But is it a living apple tree? No, it's just a fake, imitation, and artificial attempt. That is the kind of "righteousness" that was thought to be acceptable in Jesus' time, and this kind of substitute righteousness is still often accepted today.

But Jesus said it would not be good enough, that we needed instead something far greater than that. We needed real "living" righteousness. This is what the Gospel offers.

Galatians 3

²² But the scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

So we are all "under sin" which means we are all Law-breakers. And the only way to stop being law-breakers, is to believe in Christ, for a living righteousness to be put within us, that can make us a fountain of real righteousness, instead of being a fountain of sin (and fake righteousness).

²³ But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

²⁴ Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

So the role of the Law is to awaken the sinner, so that he knows he is not right in God's sight. The more he tries to stop sinning, the more he fails. This is described in *Romans 7:5-24*. This is an absolutely essential step in coming to Christ—to see our own weakness and unrighteousness. This is what prepares us to see our need of Christ. The law is part of God's plan to bring us back.

²⁵ But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

Faith has established the living link between Christ and us, and now His life is in us, in place of the old carnal mind of sin. There is a new master on the throne.

1 Timothy 1

⁹ The law is not made for a righteous man,

–because a righteous man is a law-keeper, one from whose heart flows a living stream of right thoughts and right actions. Just as Christ, “delighted to do the will of God, for His law was in Christ’s heart,”³ so it is with the new believer. He does not need the law to say, “You shall not lie,” because he no longer lies! “You shall not lie” is written into his new spiritual genetic code.

Romans 3

³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Grace Reigns Through Righteousness

Romans 5

²¹ As sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign *through righteousness* unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the whole purpose of the Gospel: to make men righteous, which means to make them true law-keepers again. Thus the Law is established by Grace. Grace puts the seed of Christ in us, and that seed has in it the code to grow into a righteous, law-keeping person. The Law says, in essence,

“Here is what you need to be, to be accepted by God.”

It shows us that we do not have that in us, and so we come to Christ to get it. Now if Christ gave us something entirely different than what the Law said, then they would not be working together. It would be a deception. But God is not a liar.

Romans 6

¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

³ *Psalm 40:8.*

² God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Sin is the opposite of righteousness. Sin is disobedience to the Law. Righteousness then is obedience to the Law. Grace therefore, is given to establish righteousness in the soul. Grace makes us dead to sin (disobedience), and alive to righteousness (obedience). It brings us into harmony with God's law.

Romans 13

¹⁰ Love is the fulfilling of the law,

–and by grace,

Romans 5

⁵ The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.

Ephesians 2

⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, [He] has quickened us together with Christ, (by grace you are saved;)

⁶ And has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

To be “quickened” is to be “made alive”. It is done by creative power. The gospel is “the power of God” to save from sin.⁴ Some have supposed that Grace is a kindly disposition in God, whereby He overlooks our sins and weakness. But this is not taught in the Bible. In *Ephesians* 2:5, grace is set forth as the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, who administers to the needy soul all the gifts of righteousness that come through Jesus Christ. We did not earn these gifts, that is why it is called grace, rather than merely power.

The written law did not have this power. It was just words on a page, or on a table of stone. But in Christ, every command has creative power. When he told the man at the pool of Bethesda to take up his bed and walk, the creative power was in that word, and the man walked in the power that Christ imparted. In Christ, the command that we “should not lie” becomes a written code in

⁴ *Romans* 1:16.

our hearts, that we will not lie. Lying will not come from the new heart, from “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”⁵

Revelation 22

¹⁵ Whosoever loves and makes a lie,

–will not be found in the city of God.

Romans 8

³ For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

⁴ That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Our human nature, in its pride and blindness, thought it could fulfill the Law. Like the Israelites after Sinai, our flesh said,

“All that God has said, we will do.”

And we tried, and if we were honest with the Spirit of God, we would admit that we failed, even very miserably. But God knew what was in human nature, and therefore He sent His Son to change that nature, so that “the righteousness of the law” could be fulfilled in us.

This “righteousness of the law” is different from what Paul described as...

Philippians 3

⁹ ...my own righteousness, which is of the law.

The latter, Paul did not want. It represented his attempts, as a Pharisee, to keep the law. It was the best attempt of the flesh, to fulfill God’s promise. It was like Ishmael: Abraham’s attempt to fulfill the promise of God through the power of his flesh.

But the “righteousness of the law” spoken of in *Romans 8:4*, is the law as God intended it: perfect law-keeping; love flowing from the heart; perfect obedience, and peace. It comes not by the

⁵ *Colossians 1:27*.

power of the flesh, but by the power of the Spirit of God, planting in man the life of Jesus Christ, and nourishing it through the living words of the Bible.

This is the only thing described in the New Testament that could be considered a “law of grace.” It is not different from the ten commandments, but is God’s idea of the ten commandments and not our low, faulty, and weak idea. Does that mean that some of the commandments have changed? No, because God does not change. His righteousness is ever the same.

Psalm 111

⁷ The works of His hands are verity and judgment; all His commandments are sure.

⁸ They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.

The Foundation of God's Government

The ten commandments that Moses delivered to Israel, were placed in the Ark, which was put in the Most Holy Place of the Sanctuary. This represented the throne room of God, where His presence dwelt. This showed that the righteousness expressed in the law was the foundation of God’s throne, the principles on which His government operated.

Psalm 89

¹⁴ Justice and judgment are the habitation [or “establishment”] of your throne: mercy and truth shall go before your face.

Psalm 97

² ...righteousness and judgment are the habitation [or “foundation”] of His throne.

This sanctuary was a small picture of the reality in Heaven, where Christ ministers as High Priest today. In *Revelation*, the heavenly “ark” is revealed:

Revelation 11

¹⁹ And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament.

Since the earthly was a pattern of the things in heaven, we know that the Law is also in the ark in heaven; that it is the foundation of His everlasting government. In the promises of the last chapter of *Revelation*, it speaks of God's throne being in the New Jerusalem:

Revelation 22

³ And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him:

And how do they serve Him? What kind of service is it?

¹⁴ Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

It is real righteousness: obedience from the heart. It is fully in harmony with the commandments expressed from Sinai. And that is what the purpose of the Gospel is, to make such righteous people, that can rule this Earth to all eternity, without lying, stealing, killing, committing adultery, and every other sin defined in God's eternal law.

The Sabbath and the Gospel

The fourth commandment is also included in this Law. It has not changed, and cannot change, for God's law is a reflection of His character, and God does not change. God knew that a Sabbath was needed for man, in order to maintain man's faith and trust in God. So Jesus kept the Sabbath, as He did all the commandments. But how He kept it, and how the Pharisees and most of the Jews kept it, are entirely different. The day of the week was not different, but the spirit in which it was kept was very different.

The Pharisees prided themselves on their own righteousness. But in God's sight, this was sin. It was unholy. Can an unholy man keep the Sabbath holy? It's impossible. So the first requirement to "keeping the Sabbath," is to know the power of God to make a man holy. This can only be done by the Gospel, and so the Gospel and the Sabbath go hand in hand.

When a man comes to the Sabbath day, full of trust in his own work and efforts, is it possible for him to switch off all these thoughts in his mind? Not at all. The thoughts of worldly business, sports games, world news, and so forth, will continually intrude into his mind. The way the day is kept today, people even feel free to do their business on the Lord's day, as long as they go to church in the morning, or some time during the day.

This is not real rest. Such people cannot learn that they depend utterly on God, when they cannot even stop their business for one day in the week. And if they can't depend on God's working to keep them physically alive, do they really depend on His working to make them holy? It's not possible. Their own righteousness will intrude in the work of salvation, and push out God's working. They don't have time to...

Psalm 46

¹⁰ Be still and know that I am God.

The Sabbath was given to teach men this one important lesson:

Ezekiel 20

¹² Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.

Can we learn this lesson without the Sabbath? The Lord says we can't. Then who are we to tell Him that we know better? This doesn't mean that the Sabbath competes with Christ! God's kingdom is not a chaos of competing interests, as worldly kingdoms are. All parts work together. Christ works in the Sabbath, to teach us that He is the Lord that sanctifies us, and that holiness does not come from our flesh, but from Him and His word.

In the book of *Revelation*, there are a group that "gain the victory over the beast and his image," and they have a special song to sing:

Revelation 15

³ And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways, You King of saints.

⁴ Who shall not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name? for You only are holy: for all nations shall come and worship before You; for your judgments are made manifest.

Now it is the purpose of the Sabbath to teach us that “I am the Lord that sanctifies them,” or in other words, that God is the source of holiness. And here, these special saints who win the final battle, declare that “You only are holy,” which means that God is the source of holiness, that it does not come from their flesh. These victorious saints have learned the lesson that the Sabbath was given for, and therefore, it had to be through faithful Sabbath-keeping that they learned this lesson.

When men set up another day, or no day at all, to replace God’s sabbath, then they declare that holiness comes (at least partly) from them; that they do not need God in this area, and they are well able to manage it themselves. They may claim that they are keeping their day to honor God, and may fill that day with all sorts of hymns and activities, but it is just “sounding brass and tinkling cymbal” if it leads men to put confidence in their own plans and ways, even though they do it supposedly to honor God. It is another Ishmael...a substitute for the promise of God.

No, the Law is not against the promises of God.⁶ It is actually the promises of God that fulfill the Law, and make us able to keep it.

⁶ Galatians 3:21.