

Truth and Grace

Neil Girard

Law

The apostle John makes an interesting statement when he says, “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (Jn. 1:17) This seemingly simple sentence contains several powerful ideas that are not readily apparent, often because our ears and hearts have become jaded to the full intent and meaning of the Spirit who inspired this statement.

When we hear “the law was given through Moses,” we most often immediately think of the story of the Ten Commandments. God called Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the wilderness and then to Mt. Sinai where Moses was given the Ten Commandments. And we are quite often content to stop there.

But there is a depth to this that has not been touched. We have neglected to even consider what the law is. Jesus said, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mk. 12:29-30)

When we review the Ten Commandments, we can find that Jesus’ words are indeed an excellent summary of the law. The Ten Commandments are:

- 1) You shall have no other gods before Me.
- 2) You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love and keep My commandments.
- 3) You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
- 4) Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.
- 5) Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.
- 6) You shall not murder.
- 7) You shall not commit adultery.
- 8) You shall not steal.
- 9) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 10) You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s. (Ex. 20:3-17)

All these things are practical extensions of loving God and loving one's neighbor. Yet the depth of this thing is still not yet exposed. For the New Testament writers tell us:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3:20)

For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect... (Heb. 7:18-19)

In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (Heb. 8:13)

Paul even goes so far as to say, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:4) And in this statement we begin to see again the contrast between law and grace. From just these few readings, we can easily see that there is something "old" about the law that is obsolete, annulled, superseded, replaced by something "new" about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet we must be careful that we know precisely what that "something old" actually is for Jesus also said, "Assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 5:18-19)

At first this seems like a complete contradiction. On one hand, the law has become outdated and yet, on the other, we are still to obey the least of its commands. How are we to understand and apply this to our lives?

The first thing we need is to understand the purpose of the law. Paul wrote:

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:19-28)

It is the duty of the law to be the tutor that teaches us our need for Christ. Before we become born again, the law teaches us that we are sinners incapable of keeping God's law. After we become born again, the law teaches us the righteousness of Christ which, outside of His Spirit, we are still incapable of exhibiting.

Paul explains this mystery more fully when he writes:

But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech - unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were hardened. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:7-18)

This is the glory of the New Covenant God has made with His people. Through the Spirit, we are granted liberty to be transformed into the very image and likeness of God Himself. The law, because it relied on human resources for obedience, could never produce the likeness of God in a man. Only the Spirit can give, or impart, the life of God.

Thus, when John says that the law was given through Moses but grace and truth through Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17), we need to recognize that the law was incapable of producing people who were righteous in God's sight and that a Savior was needed to redeem us from our inability to keep the law, an inability which brought down on our heads all the curses contained within the law.

Grace

But just as we have a shallow understanding of the law and its function in the life of a believer, so too do we have a shallow notion about grace. For what is grace? Many people would have you believe that it is the "unmerited favor" of God, that He bestows grace on those whom He arbitrarily chooses. This is inaccurate because it fails to take into account the manifold nature of God's grace.

The grace of God that brings salvation is available to *all* men. (Tit. 2:11) We have *all* received some benefit of the grace of Christ. (Jn. 1:16) But there are different graces available for different people. Paul, for instance, walked in the grace of an apostle (1 Cor. 15:10) just as surely as Jesus walked in the grace to be the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world. And these are but two examples. We could also consider that the extreme sinner who repents and then loves much is a recipient of a greater grace than the one who has few sins he needs to repent of.

The root of this is our failure to understand what grace really is. It is not the favor of God that is unmerited - that is His love and mercy toward us. We do not deserve God's love or mercy - we deserve His condemnation, wrath and judgment. But His grace, because we have received His love, mercy and forgiveness, His grace is given to us as we merit or need it. Consider this: one who is not called to be an apostle, does not need the grace to be an apostle. If he is an evangelist, he is given the grace to be an evangelist.

And yet there is still further proof in the Scriptures that grace is given to those who merit it. James wrote, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (Jas. 4:6) There are two classifications of people here - the proud and the humble. The humble merit God's grace whereas the proud merit God's opposition.

What then is grace? Grace is simply the power of the Holy Spirit resident within you which enables you to become that which God foreknew you to be. It is the basis upon which Paul could say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phlp. 4:13) It is the basis upon which Paul could know that even though a messenger of Satan was going to continue to buffet him - that is, a demonic spirit had in some unspecified way been given specific permission to continue to tempt and harass him to sin - God's grace was sufficient to keep him obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 12:7-9) It is this enabling power of the Holy Spirit, something which was entirely lacking in the law of Moses, that was given in Christ.

The beauty of this is that if God has foreknown you to be something - perhaps a prophet or a shepherd of His flock as but two examples - then you can know without the slightest doubt that His grace (His power that would make you become that to which He has called you) is available for you. You need not look to any man or any religious system - you can know that whatever God has called you to be, through His Holy Spirit at work in you and in the body of believers around you, He will equip you, by His grace, to become what He created you to be.

Truth

But what about truth? Sadly, our grasp of the nature of truth is as shallow as that of law and grace. Pilate, the consummate politician, cynically but succinctly epitomized the nature of our shallow grasp on truth when he asked, "What is truth?" and then proceeded to hand the Lord Jesus Christ over to be crucified. (Jn. 18:38)

And that is the question before us now. What is truth? In the normal realms of human activity, we tend to think of truth as an abstract concept. That is, even in our early education, we are given tests with questions which require an answer of either "True" or "False." And we become programmed to believe that a statement is, by itself, either imbued with this quality called "truth" or it is not.

I submit to you that this is looking at things backwards. Though there are indeed things in this realm, this dimension if you like, which are always true - $2 + 2 = 4$, for example - we must not forget that it is precisely because God created an orderly world that these things are always true in this realm. But how do we know that, in some other dimension which we cannot even fathom, that somehow $2 + 2$ does not equal 4? Is our concept of the multiverse so small that we cannot even accept the possibility of this?

But when it comes to the question of what is the ultimate truth, the ultimate reality, we have been told the answer by Jesus Christ Himself. He said, "I am...the truth." (Jn. 14:6) When He said that, He did not say, "Everything I say is true" although that would be an accurate statement also - and it would have been the epitome of the way we look at this concept backwards. What He said was, "That intangible quality you call truth - that is what I am." All things that are true are held within Christ in some fashion.

What happens when we insist upon looking at every statement as merely true or false, if we rely on our own ability to judge the matter, is that we partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - the same tree that brought about the fall of man into sin and death. Paul warned us that even the glorious New Covenant would bring about death if all that was ministered was the letter of

it. He wrote, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Cor. 3:5-6) Note well the letter here is not the letter of the *old* covenant, the Law, but that of the *new* covenant!

In the genuine version of the New Covenant, God’s requirements are written upon our hearts (Heb. 8:10) and are carried out by the grace God gives us through His Holy Spirit. (Rom. 8:4) In the counterfeit, God’s commands are memorized and then, through sheer will-power and personal determination, the man is left to obey those commands in his own strength or by virtue of his religious “church” habits. In the genuine, the Spirit brings the liberty to walk in obedience to God’s commands. In the counterfeit, the dead letter of the “New Covenant law” kills those who walk in it.

Grace and Truth Bring Liberty in Christ

Moses gave us a law which could not save anyone - it could only point to the Person who would save everyone who would believe. Jesus gives us grace - the power to become what He foreknew us to be - and truth - Himself, the ultimate reality. It is His truth that sets us free from our own deceptions and it is His grace which makes us like Him.

May God grant that our religiosity would no longer keep us from a genuine knowledge and experience of Him.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org
Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org
This article - <http://paidionbooks.org/girrard/deeper/trugrace.htm>