

A Doctrine of Grace

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Paul wrote, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” (Rom. 6:14)

This statement has spawned a “doctrine of grace” that has been used by some to overcome the effects of “legalism” (an over-reliance, either by individuals or by groups, upon the laws given to Moses by God). The argument is made that, because “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17), grace is on the side of truth but the law is not on the side of truth. The law is only a “ministry of death... which was passing away” (2 Cor. 3:7) and thus, these people conclude, the law has absolutely nothing to do with the believer anymore. Such people who draw these simplistic conclusions are relying on their own understanding and, in so doing, bring themselves back under the power of deception and error. (Prov. 3:5)

Paul also wrote, “Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary I would not have known sin except through the law... [But] sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is *holy* and the commandment *holy and just and good*. Has then what is *good* become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. For we know that the law is *spiritual*, but I am carnal, sold under sin.” (Rom. 7:7, 11-14) It is not the law that is wrong – it is *I* that am wrong! Nothing *I* do apart from an obedient, responsive act toward what *God* has already done will move me toward Him.

God’s standards have not changed – men only find new excuses to disregard His holy requirements upon their lives. The inference seems to be that since we are incapable of keeping the law there is no longer any reason to care at all what God said to Moses. But what is overlooked is that we are to fulfill, not the letter which kills, but the Spirit of the law which brings life. (see Gal. 6:2, 2 Cor. 3:6, Mt. 5:17) Paul even wrote, “But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, *so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit* and not in the oldness of the letter.” (Rom. 7:6) Paul’s question still stands: “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1) How can anyone who lives in *any* sin – as is defined by the law and by the Spirit – claim to be a son who belongs to and serves the holy and transcendent Most High God? Paul told us to not even eat with those “brothers” who live in habitual, flagrant sin. (1 Cor. 5:11)

This “doctrine of grace” has become a substitute for truth – the *person* of Christ Jesus – and is being used to replace other vital elements of the true gospel. Jesus did not say “*grace* will set you free” – He did say, “The *truth* will set you free.” (Jn. 8:32) Jesus did not say that grace would cleanse us or excuse us of our sins. He did say that *He* would cleanse us of our sins through His *blood*. (Col. 1:14, Rev. 1:5) As powerful as the truth about grace is – and grace is indeed intricately interwoven with truth – it is not capable of being a substitute for the person of truth and the work of the blood that Christ is and does. The person who has inadvertently believed himself to be free from sin just because he is now “under grace” has failed to receive his freedom through the truth. The one who relies on grace to free him from the burden of sin has not and does not rely on the blood of Christ to cleanse him of his sins. This subtle substitution of “the doctrine of grace” for the Person of truth and the work of the blood will have devastating effect on a believer’s life – and those who are around such a one will recognize the existence of a taint or detect this bad fruit whether they can accurately identify and discuss it or not.

A person who has made such a substitution is likely to be incapable of recognizing where

they have erred. The substitution itself is likely to be a second or third (or more) step in a series of “minor” errors. The person who regularly pleads the blood of Jesus in prayer (reminding himself and the spiritual forces aligned around him of the fact that Jesus now owns *all* of his life) is likely to be able to step away from this error at some future point. The first error may be that of putting oneself under some man’s teaching or authority at the expense of Christ’s pre-eminence in all things. Or it may be that the person has a certain personality trait that made them particularly prone to or vulnerable to an error (such as “legalism”) and when a lop-sided teaching (like the one on grace) comes along, it offers such freedom that it is seen as some kind of end-all, be-all deliverance. But grace alone, just like faith alone, is not sufficient. It is Christ and God Himself who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:23)

The one who refuses to relinquish his understandings back to God can only walk in his own light. He will progressively worsen in his error – zealotry for the doctrine will only speed this process along – and he will be unable to come to a full knowledge of the truth, the whole counsel of God. Such a one who so arrogantly resists the gentle leading of the Spirit of truth may yet find himself to be one whom God resists (Jas. 4:6) or even dismisses as lawless (Mt. 7:23) because he insisted upon having a “God” he could understand, a truth he could wrap his finite mind around. Unless God is God of our all – and that includes our understanding – there comes a point when He will not be our God *at all*. Follow the vast majority of “Christian” “church”-goers at your own risk! But never forget that not every one who *says* “Lord, Lord,” will be allowed to enter - *only* those who have *done the will of the Father in heaven*. Many will come to Him on that last day only to hear “Leave Me. I never knew you. You did only what was right in your own eyes.” (Mt. 7:21-23)

The law is not to be thrown away as a piece of trash – it is still holy and good. “The law was our tutor that brings us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (Gal. 3:24) The man who walks perfectly in the fullness of Christ, demonstrating *only* Christ and *nothing* of the flesh, might have an excuse to discard the law. But God’s law remains “perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.” (Psa. 19:7-11)

No, we are not *under* these laws but they remain a picture (a form of instruction) of God and of His expectations for our life. Viewed from this perspective, the law (especially when fulfilled through the Spirit of the law of love) paints a picture of what one’s outward life would look like if his heart and inner nature were aligned and submitted and lived in obedience to the Spirit who is God. The law – as given to Moses – does not, and never did, touch the heart. That was its incompleteness. But shall we freely sin just because God has now sent us a Savior? Shall we murder and commit adultery (literally or in our hearts) or malign, slander and neglect our brothers just because God has “set us free”? God forbid! We have been called to liberty but we must not use our liberty to find some way to return to the very things we have been freed from! In becoming free from law, we must not turn to lawlessness (doing whatever is right and good in our own eyes) just because we are under “grace.” That simply places us back under the dominion of sin. As Paul said, “sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are...under grace.” (Rom. 6:14)

Put yet another way, if our life is truly lived in obedience to the Spirit of God – speaking here of a mature walk of faith devoid of carnal or fleshly imitation of spirituality – what we say and do and are will be *in harmony* with God’s laws. We will neither live under a compulsion (internal or

external) to obey them nor will we violate the spirit of His laws – we will simply be an expression of God’s life that resembles the spiritual ways described in His laws. The laws of God are now simply a mirror (and not the only one by any means!) by which we can *know* if our life in Christ is as on track as we believe it to be. Two classic examples of this are God’s commands to “Keep the Sabbath holy” and “Honor your father and mother.” (Ex. 20:8, 12) The person who cannot cease from his labors to rest his mind and body one day a week (not necessarily the same day nor even necessarily every week – that would only be again the bondage that attends law) or the person who is flagrantly disrespectful of his parents is *not* living according to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit. Instead, by submitting himself to a different spirit that leads him to violate God’s laws, he not only places himself under demonic bondage, he also brings himself back under God’s laws. The person whose will and life is surrendered to the Lord, on the other hand, will delight to do *His* will in these matters – obeying and pleasing *Him* in all things will not be burdensome! (1 Jn. 5:3)

Grace *and* truth came from Jesus Christ. They come together as a “package deal.” We cannot choose a portion of one and a smattering of the other. Nor can we choose one and disregard the other. Grace must be controlled by truth – the Person of truth, Christ the Spirit of truth – or else it too will become just another error, a mere form of godliness that denies the liberating power of Christ, an expression of unrighteousness that we prefer to the righteousness that God is. (2 Tim. 3:5, 2 Ths. 2:11-12)

Let he who has ears hear.

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