

THE GRACE OF GOD IS APPROPRIATED THROUGH THE PERFECT LAW OF LIBERTY

One of the great mistakes made by denominational preachers is their teaching on GRACE and LAW. They teach that God's grace excludes law, and that man today is under grace and not under law. Many brethren also seem to be confused on this subject. In this article we want to show from God's word that His grace is appropriated BY law and that without obedience to law there is no grace extended to man.

The perfect law of liberty (James 1:25) and the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16) are one and the same. The gospel is designated by a number of different expressions. It is referred to as "the doctrine of Christ" (II John 9); "the faith" (Jude 3); "the truth" (John 8:32); "the word" (II Tim. 4:2); "the New Testament" (Matt. 26:28); and "the law of the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2). All of these expressions keep the gospel from being confused with the law of Moses. We need to understand that just because many expressions are used to describe the gospel does not mean it is not a system of law. It IS a system of law and is designated as being law a number of times in the New Testament. It is called "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2; I Cor. 9:21); "the law of faith" (Rom. 3:27); "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25); "the royal law" (James 2:8); and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2). From these passages one can see that the gospel is a legal system (legal means lawful). The fact that the gospel is a legal system does not destroy grace. A human will is a legal document, but what the beneficiary receives is of the grace of the testator. If the beneficiary has to meet conditions to get the inheritance, it is still of grace.

A CONTRAST BETWEEN THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE LAW OF CHRIST

1. The law of Christ is "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1: 25) because it frees us from sin (Gal. 5:1; Acts 13:39).

- The law of Moses was an imperfect law of bondage. It held man in bondage to sin (Heb. 8:7; Gal. 4: 22 - 31; Acts 15:10; Rom. 8:3).

2. The law of Christ is the perfect law of liberty because it has the perfect element of grace -- the blood of Christ -- which can forgive our sins (Matt. 26:28; I Pet. 1: 18 -19; Rev. 1:5; I John 1:7; Rev. 12:11).

- The law of Moses had an imperfect element of grace -- the blood of bulls and goats -- which could not take away sins (Heb. 10: 1-4).

3. The law of Christ is able to convict men of sin (Acts 2:37) and to acquit or justify (pardon) man of his sins (Acts 13:39; Rom. 8:2).

- The law of Moses was able to convict men of sin, but could not acquit or justify man of his sins (Rom. 7:7; Acts 13:39; Rom. 3: 19 -20; Gal. 2:16).

THE GOSPEL IS A LEGAL SYSTEM

Legal means "Lawful"; "Of, pertaining to, based upon, or governed by law". Jesus is the "one lawgiver" (James 4: 12). He has given us the gospel (Heb. 1:2). To violate His law revealed in the gospel is to sin (I John 3:4). Men are sinners today because they have violated law. What law? The law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), the gospel.

The gospel is not a legal system like the law of Moses (Heb. 8: 8 - 9; Rom. 3:21; Acts 13:39). The law of Moses was a legal system of meritorious works, and life could only be had by keeping it perfectly (Lev. 18:5). The reward would have been of debt (Rom. 4:4); The gospel is a legal system of grace (Acts 20: 24; Tit. 2: 11 - 12), and life can be had by God's acquittal (pardon) of man's sins by the blood of Christ when man has faith and is obedient to the gospel, the law of Christ (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 2:9; I Pet. 2:24; I Pet. 1: 18 -19; Mk. 16: 15 -16; Acts 2:38). The reward is of Grace (Eph. 2:8).

The New Testament is the will of Christ (Heb. 9: 16 -17). It has all the elements of a legal will: A TESTATOR - Christ; GIFTS - "remission of sins" (Acts 2:38) and eternal life to the faithful (I John 2:25); CONDITIONS - the plan of salvation (Matt. 28: 19 - 20; Mk. 16: 15 -16), plus "*All things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Matt. 28:20). Christ died and put the will in force (Heb. 9: 16 -17); It was probated on Pentecost when the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit authenticating that the will was from Christ (Acts 2); EXECUTORS - the apostles. They began to execute the will under the direction of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2); HEIRS - those who met the conditions of the will began to receive the blessings on Pentecost (Acts 2:38).

Again, let us emphasize that while the gospel is a legal system it does not destroy grace. God's grace is incorporated in the conditions which He imposes. Paul said in Rom. 5:21, "*That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord*". Here Paul said that grace reigns through righteousness, and David said "*for all thy commandments are righteousness*" (Psa. 119: 172), so grace reigns through the commandments of God. Paul called the gospel "*the gospel of the grace of God*" (Acts 20:24). He said when the Lord comes the second time He will come "*in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (II Thess. 1:8). Those who obey not the gospel fail to meet the conditions of His grace and are lost -- because "*we have access by faith unto this grace wherein we stand*" (Rom. 5:2).

JESUS' MISSION WAS TO SET MEN FREE

In the synagogue in Nazareth Jesus read from Isaiah concerning what His mission was: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord*" (Luke 4: 18 -19). This liberation that Jesus brought to the human family is by means of the TRUTH. He said in John 8:32, "*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*". David said in Psalms 119: 142, "*And thy law is the truth*". The truth and the law are one and the same, thus Jesus came to set men free by law.

CORRECTION OF A FUNDAMENTAL ERROR

Many people think of liberty as being without law. They think the "law of liberty" releases one from all obligation, but the very reverse is true. Liberty does not release one from law, it is BY law that one enjoys liberty. Where there is no restraint of law there is no liberty. Paul said in Gal. 5: 13, "*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another*". Paul warns here that they would lose their liberty by satisfying the lust of the flesh, because Jesus said, "*whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*" (John 8:34). Peter said, "*While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is brought in bondage*" (II Pet. 2:19). Where there is no restraint of law sin and chaos prevail, so the perfect law of liberty is not a suspension of law, it is a legal system by which we are made free from the bondage of guilt and sin. Paul said, "*But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness*" (Rom. 6: 17 - 18).

THE PERFECT LAW OF LIBERTY IS FIXED AND CHANGELESS

No man can alter or improve upon this law to suit himself (I Pet. 1:25). To obtain the liberty which God has provided for man in Christ Jesus, man must do exactly what the law says. This liberty is legally obtained. Paul said, "*and by him (Christ) all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*". (Acts 13:39) The word "justified" here means "to be released from sin, to be acquitted or pardoned." (Lard, Commentary on Romans, p. 42). ("Justified" is a legal term.) By the blood of Christ we are legally acquitted

of the charge of sin by God. The blood of Christ that pays for our sins must be legally appropriated by our faith and obedience (Rom. 6: 17 - 18; 6: 3,4). When one meets the conditions of the law of Christ that he might enjoy God's grace of forgiveness, he is not meriting anything -- he is simply meeting the conditions of salvation.

It must be kept in mind that this is a law that operates with legal definiteness. In becoming a Christian under the law of liberty God has set a point at which he remembers sins no more (Heb. 8: 12). Guilt of sin is sin that God holds against man (Rom. 3:23) -- forgiveness of sins is pardon of this guilt in the mind of God (Acts 13:39). We can only know God's mind by His revealed will (II Cor. 2: 9 - 13). It follows, then, that we can only know by His revelation that God no longer holds sin against us. Thus, no one can know he is saved unless he knows that he has met the conditions of salvation that God has revealed in the New Testament (Rom. 8: 16). So, no one can rightly claim that God has assured him of salvation without his faithfully obeying the conditions laid down by God in the perfect law of liberty.

THE CHANGELESS CONDITIONS OF THE LAWS OF PARDON

For one to be justified (pardoned) from his alien sins by the grace of God under the law of liberty, he must HEAR the gospel (Rom. 10:17); BELIEVE (Mark 16: 15 -16); REPENT of sins (Acts 2:38); CONFESS Christ (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10); and be BAPTIZED for the remission of sins (Acts 2: 38; 22:16; I Pet. 3: 21). These are changeless conditions which must be met by all who would be justified (pardoned) from sins by the blood of Christ. But, the application of the law of Christ does not stop here. The liberties one has in Christ (Gal. 5:1) are not unconditional (Gal. 5:4). They are liberties that must be guarded, so Paul warns against the abuse of them: "*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another*" (Gal. 5: 13). So, we retain our liberties in Christ only as long as we remain law-abiding citizens in His kingdom. God knew that no man in the kingdom of Christ under the law of liberty could keep it perfectly -- He knew we would sin (John said, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" (I John 1:8); "*If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*" (I John 1:10); therefore he has given Christians an Advocate or High Priest (I John 2: 1 -2; Heb. 2;17) and made provisions in the law for their forgiveness. The second law of pardon is given to children of God. It is REPENTANCE (Acts 8:22); CONFESSION of sins (I John 1:9); and PRAYER (Acts 8:22; I John 2;1). When a child of God sins and keeps this part of the New Testament law, he stands before God justified (pardoned) by the blood of Christ (I John 1:7 - 2: 1 - 3). John emphasizes the necessity of keeping the commandments if we are to receive the blessings of God, because God's grace is appropriated through law: "*And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments*" (I John 2:3); "*And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight*" (I John 3:22); "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.*" (John 5:3); "*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.*" (I John 5:14). No man can violate this covenant of the High Priest and be excused by God, because God's grace is appropriated through the perfect law of liberty, and this law operates with legal definiteness. Let us not forget this if we want to please God and be saved.

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