

HIS SIDE VERSUS OUR SIDE - OVERVIEW OF GALATIANS

Or, What is a TRUE Christian?

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CHAPTER 5 GRACE VERSUS LAW - GALATIANS 2:21

Coming to the doctrinal portion of our Epistle, and particularly now as we consider chapter 3, we find the argument is carried forward by three basic antitheses. One the one side -- Our Side -- are the three great words: Law, Works, Curse. Over against them -- on His Side -- are the words: Grace, Faith, Promise.

By these three we are brought to the glorious, triumphant conclusion of Justification by Faith. This also is antithetical. The sum total of law, works and curse is a state of "condemnation" -- a word we must needs borrow from Romans, where it is used in sharpest contrast to "justification," but the idea is ever present in Galatians.

It may prove helpful to set these contrasts before us so that we can visualize them and the better follow the argument:

LAW GRACE
WORKS FAITH
CURSE PROMISE
CONDEMNATION JUSTIFICATION

Facing these contrasts we must ever keep in mind that the words in the first column represent Our Side, and they are charged with utter inability to get any one over onto His Side.

Turning to the first antithesis, law and grace, we find it is basic to the entire doctrinal discussion. Paul's defense of himself and his Gospel is climaxed in a statement involving this contrast:

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." Galatians 2:21 (Note: that in this verse the word "righteousness" has the same root word as "justification.")

Law Demands -- Grace Gives

GOD has but two ways of dealing with men; He must deal with them under law or under grace. These are strict opposites. Law sets up a certain standard of conduct and imposes a penalty for its infringement. Grace finds a way of setting aside the demands and penalties of law. Grace gives, and keeps on giving.

What is Law? Whether it be the moral law, or merely human law, or the personal laws that regulate life's living, the underlying principle is always the same. That principle is justice. The law exacts something of us. In justice the law penalizes us for failure to meet its requirements. If we break the laws regulating our operation of a car, there's a fine or worse. If we disregard the laws of health we reap the consequences, known as sickness. Just so the law of GOD; to remain under it is to experience the just exactions of its demands.

My friend, never ask for justice from GOD. He has warned: "**The soul that sinneth, it shall die**" (Ezekiel 18:4); "**The wages of sin is death**" (Romans 6:23). Justice will surely pay those wages. If there is any way at all for you to get out from under, by all means do so.

What is Grace? It is the exact opposite of Law. We call it GOD's undeserved favor. It is that; but it is far more. GOD has graciously found a way of meeting the demands of His law in His own person. We deserved death, under Law. He put Himself under law and took its penalty -- death. So, having thus satisfied every demand of the law, having taken upon Himself what we deserved, He is now free to give us what we did not deserve. This is grace. It is GOD getting us over onto His Side where He is free to love us, and love us, and love us -- unrestrainedly and unconditionally.

The Limitations of the Law

Law, as we have considered it, is a constant disappointment. Through the centuries it has failed to improve the condition of man and of the world in general. It will continue to fail. These reasons are these:

1 -- *Law is limited by man's ability to keep it.* This is serious indeed. Law as a system of life is like a bridge connecting man and GOD: one end rests in divine authority; the other end rests in human ability. Man's end has broken down completely. The Westminster divines stated the case in these condemning words of the Shorter Catechism: "No mere man, since the fall, is able in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of GOD; but doth daily break them in thought, word and deed." History has proved by its repeated failures that this is all too true.

2 -- *Law cannot compel a man to keep it.* We have a law against stealing; so nobody steals? Oh, yes, they do! We have a law against lying; so nobody lies? Oh, yes, they do! The most law can do is offer the threat of penalty for its violation. If a man's desire to disregard the law is greater than his fear of the penalty, the law breaks down. And usually the penalty fails to beget a desire to keep the law.

3 -- *Law is defeated by man's "flesh" nature.* The fatal weakness of law is that it must appeal to that in man which is averse to keeping it. Man thinks he is going to do better; but -- "**when I would do good, evil is present with me**" (Romans 7:21). The flesh has its own mind; what is it? "The carnal mind is enmity against GOD; for it is not subject to the law of GOD, neither indeed

can be" (Romans 8:7). Such an indictment leaves no hope in the law. Hence the Gospel has come to do "**what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh**" (Romans 8:3).

The case against the law is that it leaves man helplessly on his own side. Why should anyone who has tasted the grace of GOD that puts man over on His Side ever be tempted to revert to the exactions and requirements of law?

The Sufficiency of Grace

Grace, as we have seen, is GOD's way of dealing with us other than by law. Grace is GOD Himself setting aside the requirements of law, because He Himself has met those requirements. Grace is GOD substituting Himself for law, as the controlling principle of life.

1 -- *Grace says*, "**By grace ye are saved**" (Ephesians 2:5). That lost man, described as "**dead in trespasses and sins**," responsive only to the world, the flesh and the devil, "**by nature the children of wrath**" -- that any such person should be saved is a miracle of grace. "**But God**" in His mercy, love and grace met every demand of His holiness and justice toward us we were -- met it in the person and saving work of CHRIST, leaving absolutely nothing for us to do, or that we could do, for our salvation. Hence -- "**By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.**" Please read Ephesians 2:1-10 for this setting forth of saving grace.

2 -- *Grace sustains*. The books of the New Testament, from Romans to Revelation, with few exceptions begin with "**Grace and peace**"; as though to say, that anyone is able to live a Christian life due to GOD's sustaining grace. Are we afflicted. He reassures, "**My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness**" (II Corinthians 12:9). Are we under trial? "**But He giveth more grace**"; and learning to submit ourselves thereto, He "**giveth grace unto the humble**" (James 4:6 -- note the "**giveth grace**" twice in this one verse).

3 -- *Grace supplies* a new principle of life. Law demands; grace gives. Law supplied no ability to keep it; we were left on our own resources -- and we had none. Grace supplies everything needful to life's living, even life itself. When by faith we take CHRIST as our Saviour we receive eternal life as a gift; we receive the HOLY SPIRIT; we are placed in GOD's favor, in a position where His grace keeps abounding to every good work -- read and mark II Corinthians 9:8.

Thank GOD, we are no more under law, but under grace. To go back under the old system is to break the supply-line of His abounding grace.

But a word of caution is needed. Grace is not antinomian; it will never lead us to act contrary to law. That the law was a temporary expedient -- only "until" the sufficiency of grace in CHRIST should be ours.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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