

LAW AND GRACE

“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

These familiar words of the apostle John are some of the most important in the Bible, for they illustrate the ONLY TWO MEANS by which man can attempt to relate to God. Either we approach Him by law, that “perfect law” given to Moses (or any of its lessor forms which compose every other religion) or we come to Him by a Person, the Lord Jesus. This is a matter of extreme gravity, for one means is doomed to certain failure, while the other promises assured glory.

We must begin by “boiling to the essence” the true meaning of the two approaches. The essence of the law is provided us by Moses in Leviticus. “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments, which IF a man do, he shall live in them” (Lev. 18:15). This means of approach involves us in a “contract of contingency,” an “IF-THEN” agreement. If we perform then we will be blessed and favored. If we don’t, cursing and rejection will be our lot, and there is No FORGIVENESS for even the slightest mistake (James 2:10). The Jews attempted this method of dealing with God, and their history is a well-chronicled narrative of failure to fulfill even the simplest terms of the agreement. “By the deeds of the law (or better termed, religion), there shall no flesh be justified, said the Paul so well-vexed in the matter, and we would do well to heed his warning (Rom. 3:20).

The ramifications of this are, of course, extremely important to the non believer who must see that nothing he can do will merit God’s favor, and also to the

Christian who sincerely desires the will of God to be fulfilled in his life. However, a large portion of Christian teaching today reflects the deadly "law by Moses," rather than "grace and truth by Jesus Christ." How often do we hear that if we do a certain thing, then god will respond accordingly, and "bless our efforts." If we pray, then God will rise up and act. if we study the Bible, then we will know God. If we obey, then we will be righteous. It may be a "hard saying" to some, for the Bible does seem to verify such a mentality, but THIS IS NOT CHRISTIANITY! No doubt our hearts are in the right place by these attempts to love our Lord, but our heads are not quite straight if we believe that these are the means by which we live the Christian life.

IF-THEN contingencies, regardless of apparent moral goodness and sincerity, are LAW, and we will sooner or later fail in our efforts. WE simply cannot fulfill God's "IFS."

And so "grace and truth by Jesus Christ" enters the picture, saving the day. It is very significant that John said grace and truth, for each has its special meaning. "Grace" reveals the contrasting covenant purchased by the Lord Jesus at Calvary. No longer must we perform "if-then" contingencies to attain and maintain god's favor, for we are now "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:3). Faith is our only role, for what he law demanded, grace provided, since the essence of grace is always GOD GIVING AND MAN RECEIVING. Anything more is law, and destined to failure (Rom. 8:3). The Christian life is purposed to be one of a total inward rest (although we are often the busiest of people), for we have "ceased from our own works" (Heb. 4:10). We "labor according

to His working, which works in us mightily" (Cpl. 1:29). The "love of Christ constrains us," that is, we can't help but do the things we do, for "He works in us to will and do of His good pleasure;" (II Cor. 5:14 - Phil. 2:13). If the "can't help it' isn't there, then we are back under law, for "to will and do" is the marvelous provision of grace, and the assurance of His working.

"Truth" also come by Jesus Christ, the truth of what a proper human life was meant to be. Jesus showed us the great mystery, hidden from the ages (and still hidden to so many), that man does not, and indeed, cannot live his own life. "I LIVE BY MY FATHER," He said, "the father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works" (John 6:57 - 14:10). this perfect human being, the only such that ever lived, refused credit for the wondrous works He performed, knowing that His life was purposed to reveal that a correct and "righteous" human life is God living in and as man. Human beings have no life in themselves, and even though the Lord Jesus did, He refused to live by it (John 5:26 - Phil 2:7). The life of Jesus Christ was a thundering proclamation that man is not called to be and do, for this is the lie from the Garden (Gen. 3:5). We are called, no, unspeakable privileged, to contain and express He who is the great Be-er and Do-er. In marvelous grace, Jesus showed us who God is - Love - and who we are- the vessels by which He is most clearly showcased to His universe. The truth of grace is that when we are seen, God is seen, for He has joined Himself unto us in a union so profound that Paul could only say "not I, but Christ" (Gal. 2:20).

Christianity is a Person, truly the only Person of essence in the universe, living in and as "clay pots"

containers such as ourselves, with all our nicks and scratches (John 14:5 - II Cor. 12:9). It is a life of "grace through faith," which is again, God giving and man receiving. so many believers are frustrated today because they have committed the Galatian error of mixing law with grace, a marriage that cannot succeed (Gal. 3:3). We have believed ourselves as responsible for at least something in this life, for we mistakenly view ourselves as independent persons in our own right. We are not, however, for as Paul said, we are "vessels of wrath" (or of Satan) before Christ, operated by him and doing his lusts, and vessels of God after salvation, doing His good (John 8:44 - Gal. 2:8 - Rom. 9:22-23). It takes many "kicks in the head" to get through to us that we are forever the cup and not the coffee, and that we cannot "Be as God." The glorious paradox is that when we do finally and totally learn that God is not in the business of deifying our humanity, we are then free and safe to live AS Christ to our world, confessing Him to be the real us, for He is the essence of our being (I John 4:17 - Acts 17:28 - I Cor. 6:17). This is the difference between law centered religion and Person centered reality. The former sees man as separate from God, and having to perform special "disciplines" to get close to Him, while the latter proclaims God as the heart of Man's being, thus fulfilling the righteousness of the law in and for him (Rom. 8:4 - I Cor. 1:30 - Phil. 3:9). Man is called ONLY to believe and never to do, for if he rightly believes, the doing is inevitable and spontaneous. "This the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent."

Law and Grace

(Part 2.)

Immediately upon making the claim (as we did in Part 1. of this article) that the Christian life is purposed to be a life of “grace through faith” rather than adherence to principles and commandments, the question arises as to what role the Biblical commandments (and our apparent call to obey them) play in our experience. This no doubt a fair inquiry, and in the answer lies the glorious abundance and fulfillment which life in Christ is meant to be.

The Apostle Paul faced a similar issue in his day, and one which he dealt with in much considered sixth chapter of Romans. As Paul shared the liberating gospel of simple faith in Jesus Christ, certain parties began to accuse him of preaching a message of licentiousness and carelessness. “Paul, they said, ‘you’re saying that all one must do to find God’s favor is to believe in this Jesus, and it makes no difference thereafter how we live. We can do any and everything we please, be it righteous or sinful, and live with no regard to any particular lifestyle or practice.’” This viewpoint, known to theologians as “antihumanism,” is that which led to Paul’s famous rhetorical question of romans 6:1: What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

No doubt language is impotent to express that which arose in Paul when confronted with this question, such an inquiry revealed an almost total lack of comprehension as to what Christianity is saying to mankind. “‘God forbid,’ he said, ‘How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?’” The Apostle’s answer to his critics here is one of the most important proclamations ever made to the church, and yet one which still remains hidden to so many of even the most

ardent of believers. “Wait a minute, you don’t understand, cries Paul, ‘this reality of grace which I preach is for more than simply favor with God and forgiveness of sin! It’s more than a future home in heaven and a relationship with God as His child! You must see it You must see it! Christianity is a NEW PERSON! You’re not a slave to sin anymore, sin CANNOT have dominion over you, for the slave to it that you used to be is dead! And not just “positionally” either, but “dead INDEED unto sin,” This tremendous trick was played on you when come to God selfishly asking for forgiveness and eternal life. He gave you a new Heart, His own, and slew the old! If you will only believe, you won’t be able to help but live a righteous life!” (For reference, simply read the entire chapter of Romans 6).

Herein lies the essence of grace, and the reason that we claim the Christian life to be a life of faith and faith alone. Such a proposal is dangerous and threatening, of course, to those who still see themselves as the same old people they were before Christ (or at least partly the same). These folk see the Christian as having “heart problems” because our heart appear to be so divided (Romans 7 totally misinterpreted). Accordingly, we must keep constant diligence to keep the dead “old man” from arising as a phoenix from his ashes and leading us to destruction, and follow numerous spiritual disciplines and obedience’s in order to provide the new man enough strength to gain ascendancy. A constant battle is waged, and if we will be painfully honest, a battle as often lost as won. Accordingly, the average believer’s life is a far cry from the joyful, peaceful, and abundant one clearly promised by Scripture, and testimonies center around what god did yesterday, and what He’s going to do

tomorrow rather than what He is TODAY. Such is life under LAW, in which the Christian bears nearly as much responsibility, if not more, than His Lord.

Grace, on the other hand, is an entirely different matter. Grace forgoes Scriptural gymnastics and simply agrees with Paul when he says that we are “made free from sin” and become “servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18). Grace affirms that “Yes, we are new people and new people alone, for Christ is joined unto us in such a union that Paul could only say ‘ONE SPIRIT’ (I Cor. 6:17). Certainly we are still temptable, and have capacity to feel the same stimulation’s as before (and even sin occasionally), but none of that changes the fact that where we live, in spirit, is different now, and we have decided to ‘walk in the Spirit; even as ‘ we live in the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:25). Jesus Christ alone is responsible for the holy lives to which we are called, for we know the marvelous secret that the Bible, both Old Testament and New, was not written to us, but to CHRIST IN AND AS US. He alone can be the righteousness of God by us, and as we simply trust Him, that righteousness is manifested in ways which we could never conceive. Further-more , it is the righteousness of a love so unspeakable that it dies for it’s enemies (Rom. 5:10), rather than a false holiness that says ‘look at ME and see the things I am doing because I love God and want to please Him.’ Grace through faith glorifies God alone, for it testifies that ‘His strength is made perfect in my weakness’ (I Cor. 12:9).”

So, we proclaim to all who will listen that Christ alone “fulfills the righteousness of the law IN us” with faith as our role, for He alone can fulfill the “ifs” of God’s contingencies. The Biblical mandates are not given to

prod us to "do our best, with God's help," but are rather, opportunities to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" - not "up there," or "by our sides," but "IN HERE," being whatever we need Him to be. We are not do-ers and be-ers, but containers of His doing and being, and this includes EVERY jot and title of our existence. If the Scriptures adjure us to "pray without ceasing," Christ IS prayer without ceasing in and as us. If we are called to "be holy even as my Father in heaven is holy." Christ IS holiness, in and as us. And if the same love is demanded of us that was expressed in the Lord Jesus, then glory of glories, we are given the marvelous privilege to affirm that HE IS LOVE AS US! Jesus Christ is our LIFE, and there is NOTHING that is not encompassed in this LIFE, no contingencies which we must fulfill in order to make it true. We just ARE - He as us.

We are arriving here at a proper anthropology, or nature of man. We have already said that humanity was created not to be and do, but to contain. The mistaken notion of Genesis 3:5, that we can "BE as gods" is the delusion which the law was given to expose, for as Paul said, it was "our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ." Humanity bought Satan's lie in the Garden that fulfillment lies in independence and operating our own existence, for this is the deception in which he lives (for just as he is "the deceiver," so is he the "deceived one" - Isa. 14:12-16). We thereby became his means of operation, his vessels, for once again, human beings were never given the capacity to be independent self-operators. we are either vessels of the false god and express his self for self existence, or we contain and express the one true God, doing His good (John 8:44 - Luke 18:19). We are "vessels of wrath," or vessels of

mercy,” walking Satan’s or walking Christs. There is no middle ground, no possibility of human being “doing his own thing,” and it is given unto us to decide our Master.

This is why the law is so important, and I don’t mean to negate its purpose by stating that we don’t live by it. The law comes to us in our delusion of separateness and says, “Okay, hotshot, you think you can do good and be good, and live a pretty decent life. Try this on for size.” Of course, If we make any serious effort in the matter, its not long before we begin to realize that we’ve bitten off more than we can chew, for it’s tough to “love your enemies,” “do unto others...,” and especially “be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Something inside us seems to keep us from doing and being what we ought, and so we decide that we’ll do the best we can, and hope that when we stand before God one day, we catch Him in a good mood. Thank purpose of it all, that the law was given to expose our deep inward plight, and along with life’s frustrations and tragedies, prepare us to receive the Divine Alternative of grace in Jesus Christ. Many do receive Him as Savior by acknowledging that any apparent righteousness produced by good intentions is simply “filthy rags,” and hat He and He alone can deliver us from our deserved condemnation.

The problem, however, is that when we do finally take God’s alternative of the Lord Jesus, we more often than not carry over remnants of the deception in which we previously lived. We’re so grateful to God for His unspeakable gift, and so confident that He will “help” us to live as we should, that we set out to be and do all that we can for Him. It isn’t long, of course, before we find

out that we aren't going to be as successful as we had hoped, but God honors our passion by doing many great and wonderful things by us. Prayers are answered, the Bible becomes an "open book," people are led to the Lord, and life is exciting, rich, and meaningful. We seem pretty able to obey God's commandments, always giving God the glory, but still glad that we are "doing His will."

The time comes, however, when we must grow up, and discover the ultimate purpose for which we were created, and our "honeymoon period" must end. Our intensity in serving the Lord begins to waver, the Bible becomes a bit dry, prayers go unanswered, often because they are never prayed (those previously exciting times on our knees having lost some of their attraction), and we discover what Brother Paul meant when he said "to will is present with me, but HOW to perform that which is good, I find not, (Rom. 7:18). We blame ourselves for our plight, bearing both consciously and unconsciously the heavy burden of condemnation, and knowing that we just aren't what we "ought to be." Little do we know, however, that it is God Himself who has dried up our oasis, that we may know the full implications of our inheritance in Christ, and His wonderful mystery "hidden from the ages."

We have learned the negative lesson which the "new man" must learn, that even after becoming the sons of God, we still are unable to do and be. Our difficulty, however, is that this is no easy admission, and we therefore turn to more spiritual disciplines or principles, revivals, gifts of the Spirit, tapes, and rededication as the means for the renewal we so desperately need. Perhaps we do get "re-charged" for a time, but only for a time,

and if we will be honest about it, we always end up again in the "slough of despond" which drowns us in Paul's wretchedness of Romans 7:24. Our wings of obedience and adherence to principles which we were so sure should keep us aloft are broken, along with our hearts, and many of us are sure that an angry and disappointed God awaits only the proper time to mete out a very deserved chastisement.

"Oh the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). To those of broken wings and shattered dreams, He bestows new wings and new visions! "You simply attempted to fly without the proper equipment, precious one," He says, "obedience and principles are not for you to be concerned with, no, that is given unto the only begotten, and His wings are yours." He then gently removes our broken ones in tender love and compassion, replaces them with His own, and in the greatest surprise of our lives, we find ourselves borne aloft immediately, surely, and forever. we finally ARE what we "ought to be," for the missing piece of the puzzle is in place - the missing piece of KNOWING who we are.

The law gives us a Bible of thousands of commandments to be obeyed, grace provides us a Bible of those commandments fulfilled in ONE PERSON, Jesus Christ. The law tells us to grace tells us to believe. The law requires that we attempt to live separately (for obedience to God implies separateness), grace proclaims that humanity lives in union with the Father, "by the Father," as Jesus said, and that separateness and independence is delusion. Finally, the law kills (in the

life non-believers and believers alike), grace renews and resurrects, bringing strength out of weakness, joy from sorrow, life through death. Grace is a Person, truly the only Person in the universe, living out His eternal love existence in the special expression that is man. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and ever. Amen."

LAW AND GRACE

(Part 3.)

We now must focus upon the practical issues of life in our discussion of law and grace. Having stated in parts 1 and 2 of this series of articles that the essence of grace is God living out His love existence in and as man, and having made the claim that the Lord Jesus Christ is totally responsible the EVERY jot and tittle of our lives (including adherence to the commands of both Old Testament and New), the question arises as to how we become in everyday living who we already are in the spiritual reality which God deems as truth. If Christ really is our Life, the essence of our being and the real us, then how can we know and enjoy such an experience in the pressures and complexities which comprise modern living?

We begin by stating simply that there is a "beginning," an "entering into" of this reality, an awakening as decisive and profound as our first

experience of the Lord when we are born again. Somehow the Lord speaks to us, usually after the frustrating struggle of trying to be the best Christian that we can, and reveals to us a better way, indeed, an only way. He tells us that just as we couldn't save ourselves at the start in order to attain God's forgiveness and Fatherhood, neither can we save ourselves now in our desperate struggle to "perform that which is good" (Rom. 7:22). He explains that there is a "rest which remains unto the people of God," a rest which is actually within us already, in the Person of the Lord Jesus. We learn that our problem has been in our delusion of ability to be and do, and that our Solution is in recognition of the truth of the matter, which is that we are no do-er and be-ers, but CONTAINERS of His doing and being. He tells us that we are vessels, as Paul said, and that the real us, our spirit, has been joined unto the Lord Jesus in such a union that the Apostle called it ONE spirit (I Cor. 6:17). To our amazement, He tells us that if we will only believe, we will know and experience (and most importantly, others will also).

Herein is where the battle is joined (and please don't take the word "battle" too literally, since the all too prevalent "spiritual warfare" teaching of these times has multitudes of believers living in fear and constant self introspection). Even as when we were born again, it is now given unto us to decide, to choose to believe whatever we will, for the knowing of Christ as Life is solely a matter of FAITH. Will we believe what the Lord is saying to us and about us though it may (and usually does) contradict every appearance in our lives? Or will we believe that appearances, bemoaning our past experience, present feeling, and future fears? Perhaps it

is better to simply ask, will we believe Truth and Reality, or will we believe the delusion of independence? this is our "fork in the road," so similar to the one faced when first we believed in the Lord Jesus, and one which equally demands the "no looking back" of those who hand to plow (Luke 9:62).

If we choose to believe, we simply take what the Lord is offering. "Lord, I don't understand it, and it certainly doesn't appear to be true," we admit, "but I accept that what Your Spirit and Word is saying this and in me is true. I am Christ in and as me and the life that I live, I live by His faith, with no ifs, ands, or buts about it. I take You-centered grace in place of me-centered law, and it's all up to you from now on." We do NOTHING else in the matter, for our previous failure in the law-centered existence of so-called "spiritual" disciplines and efforts at obedience has taught us will that there is nothing else that we can do. We simply say what is true about us, leaving our experience of His life in the Lord's hand and time.

At this point, it can and usually does happen that everything in our life begins to tell us that we have made one huge mistake, and that surely we are deceived and tricked by the devil. Well meaning friends confirm this for us with sincere attempts to straighten us out, there may not seem to be any great change, and there's just no "evidence" in our lives. we may try to run, but curiously, we find there's no place to hide. we can't seem to escaped our stand of faith, as if we were slaves of a rubber band which might stretch a bit as we struggle, but which always snaps us back to where we started. The Red Sea that we crossed just isn't parted

anymore, and we find ourselves believing that which just does not seem to be true. Indeed, it seems that the only thing that we have left is this ridiculous faith that Christ really is our All in all, despite the appearance (John 7:24) - Rom. 4:17).

And then it happens. Somewhere, somehow, some place, somebody puts the lamp in. and we see it. In fact, we see it more clearly than anything we have ever seen before: we really are Christ in us!! He really is our Life, indeed, He has been from the start, but we just didn't know. And that's it, too. We KNOW! "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed!" cried David so long ago, and we shout it with him! It's no longer I that liveth, but Christ that liveth in me! Even as when we first believed in the Lord Jesus and received the assurance that He was our Savior and Lord, now we are sure that He is life itself!! We see how absurd it has been to try to be what only Christ can be, but we see also how necessary our path of struggle, frustration and failure has been, for it is a fact in God's universe that the road to heaven runs through hell, the hell of learning that independence and self-effort is Satan's deception. Thank God that such a hell prepared us for our present heaven, the heaven of a total Christ, a Christ who is everything that we need Him to be, and who is that everything IN and AS US!!!

It goes without saying, of course, that our everyday lives are transformed and take on a new meaning. We begin to see God where never we had seen Him before, in ourselves particularly as well as in other, and in the circumstances and situations which comprise modern living. For ourselves, we no longer have to "feel His presence," be in religious atmospheres, or be doing

apparently "spiritual" activities to experience His reality. Norman Grubb said it well in a booklet entitled "The Key To Everything," "If Christ is your other self, then Christ washes dishes. He spanks the youngsters. If Christ is your other self, He handles the accounting machine, and runs the business." We now experience the Lord Jesus in anything we maybe up to, because we now know that it is He living our lives! No longer is God confined to specified formats and feelings, because as Jesus informed the woman at the well, the time was coming when worship would leave realm of space and time, and enter the reality of spirit and truth. That time is NOW for all who will have it, a now where the feelings, reasonings, and conditions of soul and body (whether positive or negative) are no longer our Truth, but merely the prods and springboards for the unspeakable inner KNOWING of spirit reality, and of the Christ who is that reality.

A quick example may be helpful here. Perhaps we begin to feel hatred and resentment for a person with whom we work. Knowing from the Biblical record that Christ is not hatred and resentment, but rather perfect love, how do we deal with such a feeling, and reconcile the fact that we are Christ and in, and as us? In the old days, of course, we would have simply admitted that the hatred was us (our "old man") and that we need to confess the feeling as sin and pray for the grace to love the "hate." This often didn't work, of course, but until we became tired with the frustration of numerous failure, we kept up the effort. Condemnation was the inevitable result, and we lived with the constant notion that we just weren't doing enough (prayer, Bible study, obedience, etc.) in order to get the Lord to live His life through us

(implying, of course, that He is somewhat reluctant to do so).

So how do we deal with such a situation now? How can we feel hatred and still be this: We are not our feelings! No, those who have discovered the reality of Christ their very lives and selves have discovered that the essence of our being is spirit, rather than soul and body (the realm of feeling). We no longer live by what our humanity and it's mental, emotional, and physical faculties proclaim, but rather by what the Spirit of God has revealed to us Truth, both Biblically and within. "It is longer I that lives, but Christ that lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), said the Apostle Paul, and we joyfully echo His claim, regardless of feelings of hatred in question, we now USE them as opportunities to say what is true about us, thus fulfilling the mandate of James to "count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations." We admit that "yes, I feel hatred for so and so, but the real me is the Christ who is love, and therefore by His love as me, I love so and so." We don't fight our feelings, because we recognize that we live in a humanity still temptable, and in a world more that eager to provide temptation. We simply say what is true of the Lord Jesus in the situation, thus freeing Him to manifest Himself by us in ways that our former law-centered philosophy could never produce. "The just shall live by faith," the faith of knowing an imminent, totally involved God eager to be in an outward, "rubber meets the road fashion" what He already is within EVERY believer: The Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

Words cannot express what this new and liberating inner knowing of Christ means in our everyday

experience. No longer do we condemn and kick ourselves for being susceptible to temptation, for we have discovered the "dividing asunder" of soul and spirit spoken of by the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 4:11). We learn to "walk in the Spirit" even as we "live in the Spirit," for we now know that our souls (mind and emotions) and bodies are not who we truly are in essence, but rather the means by which our essence is expressed. That essence is the Spirit of Christ joined unto our spirit in a union beyond the capacities of human language to describe, and which Paul simply called ONE spirit. To His eternal praise, the Lord Jesus Christ is who we are, and we live believing in Him as the real us, while never losing our unique and necessary identity as the human means by which He is expressed (for in the great paradox that is reality, our former failures have taught us well that we can never "be as gods," and that god alone is God, the great "I AM").

Finally, it must be stated clearly that any discussion of the practical implications of Christ living in and as us can never be too specified, for we are all unique and special expressions of His Person. Of course, we know the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5, and we can be certain that our "not I, but Christ" experience will exhibit such, but how that fruit will be manifested is not ours to discern. It is given unto us to simply believe that the Lord Jesus Himself IS that fruit in us, and as we do so, He will spontaneously, and without effort on our part, BE for and as us whatever particular fruit our worlds need us to be. We jump back into law and independence by anything more, and into unreality we start judging by feeling and behavior. Therefore, let us boldly and unequivocally say what is so, that we may

prove in our day the "Apostle's proclamation of so long ago...

"Faithful is He who calleth you, who also will do it" (I Thes. 5:24).

LAW AND GRACE

(Part 4.)

We are approaching the summit how in our consideration of law and grace, the ultimate purpose intended for all who experience the grace of God in Jesus Christ. As our ascent is completed, we will discover a much different apex than we perhaps expect, an apex more glorious, more vital, and certainly more impassioned than our previous Christian experience could have ever led us to imagine. "For if that which is done away is glorious, MUCH MORE that which remains is glorious," said the Apostle Paul, and we now march full force into that which is indeed "much more."

We begin by remembering the basic premise of this series of articles, that the essence of grace is Jesus Christ joined unto human beings in such a profound union that He is who they are, that is, His life, His love, His character expressed through our unique and intricate capacities and personalities (I Cor. 6:17 - Gal.2:20). we are vessels of His Being, persons in THE Person, NEVER operating independently our own lives, and never with

inherent capacity to “do our own thing” (for even before Christ, we were operated by another, namely Satan, the god of independence - Isa. 14: 13-14 - John 8:44). Grace for the human being simply and only involves FAITH, the faith of laying aside our own deluded efforts at doing and being, and believing on the Lord Jesus as our total and perfect everything.

Of course, we have all been the other route, that route of law which demands of us that we “obey His voice indeed” and “be as gods,” and we have done so both before and after we trust Jesus as Savior and Lord. Our consideration has primarily been with our attempts to “handle the oars” after salvation, and so before we discuss the ultimate end of grace, it may be wise to see exactly where it is that we were attempting to go in our illusion of independence. What was our ultimate goal when we lived under law (or under a mixture of law and grace)?

O course, the answer to such a question appears multi-faceted, for within the body of Christ, there are myriad’s of different backgrounds, personalities, and teaching emphases. For many, simply being a “good person” and trying to love others was the purpose and responsibility of being Christian. Others agreed with that but added the element of uniting with a particular church, and being careful not to “forsake the assembling of ourselves together.” Still others made evangelism the highest attainment possible within the believer’s experience, in an effort to not become “self-centered.” Then there were those who carried the matter much deeper, determining that God requires a holiness of character, thought, and deed for holiness of character,

thought, and deed far beyond the average believer's conception. Also in this group were the Bible students studying their way into God's favor and joy, the prayer warriors praying their way therein, and of course in recent times, the charismatic with their emphasis on gifts of the spirit, demonic deliverance's, faith, and bodily healings, etc. Most likely, we found ourselves operating in a combination of these varying philosophies, while perhaps stressing one or two above the others (bringing to mind, of course, those, who teach the need for "balance" in our Christian experience).

Now, how can it be said that a simple answer will suffice in delineating a single goal and purpose for those attempting to live the Christian life by law, considering the fairly large conglomeration listing above, and are we even justified in making such a claim?

Our answer lies simply in uncovering the root of each of the varying emphases mentioned, namely, the root of believing that human beings possess an independent selfhood or being which must become something or do something in order to be a shining trophy of which the Lord is rightfully proud. In other words, there are contingencies involved, that is, we have an independent self which must perform certain steps in order for the Lord to reciprocate and perform that which we desire of Him. Of course, we all have believed and prayed in our past experience that "the Lord has to do it through me," or "it has to be by His grace, or by His power," but we still hang on to a human self which had to perform certain "rites of passage" in order to get the Lord to live passage" in order to get the Lord to love through us. We simply believed that we are persons in

our own right, with being and abilities separate from God, and forgetting the Apostle Paul's proclamation that "in Him, we live, and more, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). It is a painful admission for all, and this is in no way meant in a condemning sense (for the Lord purposes the varying routes we have taken), but our goal under such law-centered philosophies was quite simply human deification, that is , we unconsciously were being tempted to attaining Deity, or godhood! (proven by our frequent prayers that the Lord make us "Christ-like", a heresy begun by Satan, see Isa. 14:14).

Law, in the form of Biblical commands, comes to us in this delusion of separateateness and says "Be loving, be holy, be patient, do this, do that, do more," and our hearts of righteousness lead us to give it our best shot, never realizing that we are attempting to be what only god Himself is (and not realizing that He already IS in and as us what we are striving for). we don't know it at the time, but the law is being exactly what Paul said that it is, our "schoolmaster which leads us to Christ." Even as it led us to Him for deliverance from the penalties and consequences of sin, it now leads us to Him for the simple living of life, and the fulfillment of what the Scriptures indicate that we are supposed to be. The law is having it's final and most complete work, for it is exposing the root of independence which humanity bought in Eden by imposing responsibilities upon us which we are helpless to fulfill. Under law we see ourselves as separate self operating selves with an unconscious goal of godhood, but find ourselves without capacity to achieve that goal (Rom. 7:18-19).

The glorious and surprising thing of it all is that God intended all along that we go this way, for our discovery of what our fulfillment and purpose is must begin by the discovery of what it is not (Gal. 1:15). The universe which we are inheriting in Christ must have safe operators if it is to be eternally secure, and we can only be those safe operators if we have tasted to the full the bitter dregs of the wrong way (independence), rejected it, and then passionately and with all of our being receive the right way ("not I, but Christ). Which leads us finally to the intended and glorious purpose of this article.

The universe is the creation and expression of a Person who showed us in His Son that He is eternally a self for others, that is, He is love (I John 4:16). He "seeketh not (His) own," being eternally fixed in finding His own fulfillment, His own pleasure, by being for the fulfillment and pleasure of others. he is the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world," deliberately available to be whatever His precious creation of humanity needs Him to be, even to the point of dying that they might live.

In the eternal purposes of this unspeakably wonderful Person, He chose to bring into existence a race of beings like Himself ("in His image") through whom He would rule and develop His universe. These "person" would know their complete and total dependence on Him, and would indeed be simply expressions and forms of His essence. Creation would be their inheritance because of their identification and union with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, around whom everything which God's purposes is centered. They would in fact be "joint-heirs" with Christ, and by Him,

through Him, and for Him reign forever a universe intended to showcase the goodness of God (Rom 8:17).

It goes without saying, of course, that such a vast responsibility requires responsible persons, that is persons who are "safe to operate and develop their inheritance correctly. And what is it that would make such a race of kings safe? We have already touched on the answer above, in describing the character of God. In order for the universe to be secure in the hands of those through whom God will rule and reign, they must be as He is, that is, other lovers who live not to gain their own ends, but the ends of others. We must "die" to the possibility of being for ourselves, and rise to the reality which God Himself knows. We must be "fixed" in love by confronting the choice of love's opposite, tasting that death to such a degree that we know it is death, and then saying yes to the perfection of the love that is God (for He alone is that Love).

This is where grace enters the picture, the grace of being joined unto the Lord Jesus in the "one spirit" union mentioned previously. It is not within humanity to be in and of itself the safe and responsible per-person necessary for such an incredible destiny. We cannot BE love we cannot be those who die that others may live, but it remains that this is the ultimate purpose of the grace of God in our lives. As the German theologian Bonhoeffer said, the call to Christianity is the call to come and die, even as God, being love, is that One who eternally dies to being a self lover by choosing to ever give His Son to be the Life of others. This is forever the principle of operation in the universe, and EVERYTHING that comes into existence results from the Father

refusing to draw the Son unto Himself for His own ends, and choosing rather to give (for by the Son, ALL things consist - Col. 1:17). Thus, John said that the Lamb was slain "before the foundation of the world," for this death is an eternal reality, ever proceeding forth from this fixed love that God has chosen to be. The Apostle Paul also incited such a truth when he claimed to be "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," and that he "filled up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1:24). This is the total and ultimate calling of grace, the calling to die that others might live, to share in the sufferings of Christ, a life known Biblically as intercession.

But again, such a calling is repugnant and terrifying to a human self which sees itself as having to fulfill such a responsibility itself. Humanity is geared toward self preservation rather than self giving, and even the thought of dying for others, while considered a noble ideal, is still shunned and feared for practical living. This is why the grace of God must completely shatter us by revealing that the illusion of an independent, self-operating self is "as the chaff which the wind driveth away." We are not, we cannot, He is, and He can, and glory of glories, He is and He does in us, for us, and indeed, AS us! Again, we "bear about in our bodies the dying OF THE LORD JESUS," "His sufferings abound in us," for He has chosen to fulfill the UNIVERSAL reality accomplished in His only begotten son, SPECIFICALLY in those who by receiving Him have been given "the power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). The "operation of God," that is, resurrection from death, now operates in us who have believed, and we experience the same fulfillment which

God knows, that of being a self for others (indeed, He IS that fulfillment).

What a glorious reality, but glorious only to those who know the totality of Christ living as us. If that reality has not become fixed within us, such an idea of :I die daily: can only be a morbid, frightening, and even more law-centered existence. there have, in fact, been those in the body of Christ who have attempted to make suffering their own attainment, and have worn it as a badge of honor. many have attempted to create their own sufferings, not realizing that truly God-ordained sacrifice always finds us and never the reverse. Such attempts inevitably lead to gloom, despair, and a false humility which focuses on the human self, and are not what we are speaking of here!! (I Cor. 13:1-3). True intercession is Jesus Christ - His love, His sacrifice, His death, His resurrection - fulfilled in those who simply believe, with the resulting focus never on the "death that works in us" but rather on the "life that works in other." accordingly, such a life is lived joyously and passionately in the midst of whatever cost our commission involves.

Intercession is God saying in us, "I am going to do a certain thing in your world, and I am going to do it by you." That "certain thing" can take myriad's of forms, but it ever and always centers on one purpose: that Jesus Christ may be revealed as All in all. There is always cost involved, that "death" mentioned previously, because again the "operation of God" is eternally life springing forth from death. Our humanity may indeed shy from the sacrifice which deep within we know will be necessary, and we may not "feel" as if we even want to go along. But somehow we find that we MUST. "The love

of Christ constrains us," our hearts yearn within, and the purpose of God is now OUR purpose. "Lord, I see Your will, Your desire in this matter formed in me, and I agree with You that it will be done. In fact, I say that it is done now, since time and appearance are not factors in eternity, and this is an eternal matter." We are fully cognizant that there will be a price to be paid before our commission is fulfilled outwardly, but again, our focus is not on that price, but on our purpose, for we are confident that "our sufficiency is of God" (II Cor. 3:5).

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). We live in a world today which quite frankly does not give as attentive an ear to our good news as in previous times. The average person is so bombarded with solicitation from our age of communication, that often our testimony of Christ can appear to be just another sales pitch. We often blame ourselves for this lack of attention, citing failure in the areas of witness, prayer, holiness, etc., and reflecting once again the law-centered idea that we possess a capacity to somehow "help" God fulfill His purposes. As stated previously, such a perspective is the very reason for our frustration, and thank God that He has provided an Alternative.

That Alternative is the death of Christ, with its subsequent fruit of a Life beyond description. It is given unto human beings to be the expression of God's creative and redemptive processes, to indeed "work out our own salvation" by the full awareness of the God who "works in us to will and do of His good pleasure." (Phil. 2:12-13). The extreme nature of our generation's

rejection of Truth has made necessary an extreme response: we must die that they might live. Of course, it has always been this way, for God ways have not changed, but today the focus is ever more clear. Our words, our prayers, our programs, our literature, our efforts can not be seen as the basis by which our mission is accomplished! That basis is the one Paul knew 2,000 years ago: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (II Cor. 2:1-5). Jesus Christ crucified in us, as us TODAY is the means by which our world will know the glory of His resurrection, and the grace of God is such that because he is the very essence of our being, our life, indeed, the real us, that "death works in us that life might work in others." It is given unto us to simply believe, and as we do, we will be that "corn of wheat" for our particular worlds, with it's inevitable result of "much fruit."

Finally, as we close this series of articles on "Law and Grace," it must be said that perhaps the most significant result of knowing Jesus Christ in and as us is that we are finally delivered from the self-centered "What's in it for me?" existence which is the source of all human frustration. Because our illusion of an independent self-operating self has been replaced by that One who "seeketh not (His) own," we now view life in a totally different perspective. No longer do circumstances, trials, and tribulations illicit in us that tired old "Why is this happening to me?" complaint, but rather a new and vibrant "Who is this for?" rejoicing. EVERYTHING that happens to us is for slaughter," and we are so spontaneously and joyfully, constrained by the love of Christ.

We have finally answered for ourselves the age old question of "Why do the righteous suffer?", for we have discovered the pain, loss, and death in us is blame, gain, and indeed eternal life for others. And we would have it no other way.

"And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."

"Therefore I take pleasure in necessities, in reproaches, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong."

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