

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER XXVII

LAW AND GRACE

The words law and grace represent widely differing methods of divine dealing with men. It is therefore well first to consider them separately:

I. THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF THE WORD "LAW"

1. Law as a Rule of Life.

When used to indicate a rule of life, the word "law" has various meanings:

(1) The Ten Commandments, which were written by the finger of God on tables of stone (Exod. 31:18).

(2) The whole system of government for Israel when in the land which included the Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17), the Judgments (Exod. 21:1 to 24:11), and the Ordinances (Exod. 24:12 to 31:18).

(3) The governing principles of the yet future kingdom of the Messiah in the earth, which are in no way gracious in character, but rather are said to be the fulfilling of the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:1 to 7:29. Note 5:17, 18; 7:12).

(4) Any aspect of the revealed will of God for men (Rom. 7:22, 25; 8:4).

(5) Any rule of conduct prescribed by men for their own government (2 Tim. 2:5; Matt. 20:15; Luke 20:22). The word "law" is also used a few times of a force in operation (Rom. 7:21; 8:2).

2. The Law as a Covenant of Works.

Under this conception of the law, its scope is extended beyond the actual writings of the Mosaic system and the Kingdom law, and includes any human action which is attempted (whether in conformity to a precept of the Scriptures or not), with a view to securing favor with God. The law formula is "If you will do good, I will bless you." Thus the highest ideal of heavenly conduct, if undertaken with a view to securing favor with God instead of being undertaken because one has already secured favor through Christ, becomes purely legal in its character.

3. The Law as a Principle of Dependence on the Flesh.

The law provided no enablement for its observance. No more was expected or secured in return from its commands than the natural man in his environment could provide. Therefore, whatever is undertaken in the energy of the flesh is legal in its nature, whether it be the whole revealed will of God, the actual written commandments contained in the law, the exhortations of grace, or any spiritual activity whatsoever.

For the child of God under grace, every aspect of the law is now done away (John 1:16, 17; Rom. 6:14; 7:1-6; 2 Cor. 3:1-18; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14; Gal. 3:19-25). (1) The legal commands of the Mosaic system and the commands which are to govern in the kingdom are not now the guiding principles of the Christian. They have been superseded by a new and gracious rule of conduct which includes in itself all that is vital in the law, but restates it under the peculiar order and character of grace. (2) The child of God under grace has been delivered from the burden of a covenant of works. He is not now striving to be accepted, but rather is free to live as one who is accepted in Christ (Eph. 1:6). (3) The child of God is not now called upon to live by the energy of his own flesh. He has been delivered from this feature of the law, and may live in the power of the indwelling Spirit. Since the written law was addressed to Israel, she alone could be delivered from the written commandments of Moses by the death of Christ. However, both Jew and Gentile were delivered by that death from the hopeless principle of human merit, and from the useless struggle of the flesh.

II. THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF THE WORD "GRACE"

This word, which in salvation truth has but the one meaning of unmerited favor, represents a divine method of dealing with men which has obtained from Adam until the present time, except for the intrusion of the law system which was in force in the time between Moses and Christ. Under grace, God does not treat men as they deserve, but He treats them in infinite grace, without reference to their deserts. This He is free to do on the ground of the fact that the

righteous punishment for sin which His holiness would otherwise impose upon sinners as their just desert was to be borne, or has been borne, for the sinner by the Son of God.

In Exodus 19:3-25 a record is given of Israel's choice by which they passed from a grace relationship to God into a law relationship. In each instance they were sinners, but through sovereign grace and in spite of their sin God had been able to bear them on eagles' wings and bring them to Himself (19:4). God proposed the law to them, but did not impose the law on them (19:5-7), which law the people accepted (19:8). Thus they deliberately forsook their priceless position under grace, which was according to the covenant made with Abraham, and assumed the impossible responsibility of law by which they must stand or fall before God on the basis of their own merit. Immediately upon this choice God became unapproachable (19:9-24), though before, He had brought them to himself on eagles' wings. The nation thus fell from grace by choosing a covenant of works in place of the gracious mercy of God. The experience of that nation is the experience of every individual who trusts in his own good works or merit, and does not depend on the boundless grace of God, which in Christ Jesus is provided for and offered to all.

Divine grace is three-fold in its operation:

1. Salvation by Grace.

God saves sinners by grace, and there is no other way of salvation offered to men (Acts 4:12). Saving grace is the limitless, unrestrained love of God for the lost acting in compliance with the exact and unchangeable demands of His own righteousness through the sacrificial death of Christ. Grace is more than love; it is love set free and made to be a triumphant victor over the righteous judgments of God against the sinner. When saving a sinner by grace, it is necessary that God shall have dealt with every sin, which would otherwise demand judgment and thereby hinder His grace. This He has wrought in the death of His Son. It is also necessary that every obligation shall be cancelled, and to this end salvation has been made an absolute gift from God (Eph. 2:8; John 10:28; Rom. 6:23). Likewise, it is necessary that every human merit shall be set aside, lest the thing which God accomplishes shall be in any measure based on the merit of men, and not on His sovereign grace alone (Rom. 3:9; 11:32; Gal. 3:22). Since every human element is excluded, the Gospel of grace is the proclamation of the mighty, redeeming, transforming grace of God, which offers eternal life and eternal glory to all who will believe.

2. Safe-keeping through Grace.

It is through grace alone that God keeps those who are saved. Having provided a way whereby He can act in freedom from His own righteous demands against sin, having disposed of every human obligation for payment, and having set aside eternally every human merit, God has only to continue the exercise of grace toward the saved one to secure his safe-keeping forever. This He does, and the child of God is said to stand in grace (Rom. 5:2; 1 Pet. 5:12).

3. Grace Provides a Rule of Life for the Saved.

God teaches those who are saved and kept how they should live in grace, and how they may live to His eternal glory.

As the law provided a complete rule of conduct for Israel, so God has provided a complete rule of conduct for the Christian. Since each and all rules of life which are presented in the Bible are complete in themselves, it is not necessary that they shall be combined. Therefore the child of God is not under law as a rule of life, but he is under the counsels of grace. What he does under grace is not done to secure the favor of God, but it is done because he is already accepted in the Beloved. It is not undertaken in the energy of the flesh, but it is the outliving and manifestation of the power of the indwelling Spirit. It is a life which is lived on the principle of faith. "The just shall live by faith." These principles are stated in portions of the Gospels and the Epistles.

QUESTIONS

1. What is represented by the words law and grace?
2. Name the three-fold principle of the law.
3. Name five aspects of the law as a rule of life.
4. Define what is involved in the law as a covenant of works.
5. Define what is involved in the law as a principle of dependence on the flesh.
6. What aspects of the law are done away for the child of God under grace?
7. What particular deliverance came to the nation Israel, and what two deliverances came to all mankind through the death of Christ?
8. a. What is the Biblical meaning of the word grace?
 - b. How long has grace obtained?
 - c. When and for how long did it cease?
9. a. Describe the experience of Israel as recorded in Exodus 19:3-25 in passing from grace into law.
 - b. At that time did God propose or impose the law?
10. How does Israel's experience illustrate the position of every self-trusting sinner?
11. Wherein is divine grace more than divine love?
12. a. What has been divinely accomplished by the death of Christ regarding the three major principles of the law?
 - b. What alone is imposed on the sinner as the condition of eternal salvation?
13. Describe the exercise of grace in the safe-keeping of those who are saved.

14. a. By what rule are those who are saved by grace expected to live?
- b. Is this a rule complete in itself?
- c. What is the motive which should actuate its observance?
- d. Where in the Scriptures is the grace rule presented?