**THE FUNDAMENTALS: A TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH**

**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 7. THE GRACE OF GOD**

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Grace is an English word used in the New Testament to translate the Greek word, Charis, which means "favor," without recompense or equivalent. If there is any compensatory act or payment, however slight or inadequate, it is "no more grace" - Charis.

When used to denote a certain attitude or act of God toward man it is therefore of the very essence of the matter that human merit or deserving is utterly excluded. In grace God acts out from Himself, toward those who have deserved, not His favor, but His wrath. In the structure of the Epistle to the Romans grace does not enter, could not enter, till a whole race, without one single exception, stands guilty and speechless before God.

Condemned by creation, the silent testimony of the universe (Rom. 1:18, 20); by wilful ignorance, the loss of a knowledge of God once universal (Rom. 1:21); by senseless idolatry (Rom. 1:22, 23); by a manner of life worse than bestial (Rom. 1:24, 27); by godless pride and cruelty (Rom. 1:28, 32); by philosophical moralizings which had no fruit in life (Rom. 2:1, 4); by consciences which can only "accuse" or seek to "excuse" but never justify (Rom. 2:5, 16); and finally by the very law in which those who have the law boast (Rom. 2:17; 3:20), "every mouth" is "stopped, and all the world becomes guilty before God."

In an absolute sense, the end of all flesh is come. Everything has been tried. Innocence, as of two unfallen creatures in an Eden of beauty; conscience, that is, the knowledge of good and evil with responsibility to do good and eschew evil; promises, with the help of God available through prayer; law, tried on a great scale, and through centuries of forbearance, supplemented by the mighty ethical ministry of the prophets, without ever once presenting a human being righteous before God (Rom. 3:19; Gal. 3:10; Heb. 7:19; Rom. 3:10, 18; 8:3, 4); this is the Biblical picture. And it is against this dark background that grace shines out.

**DEFINITION**

The New Testament definitions of grace are both inclusive and exclusive. They tell us what grace is, but they are careful also to tell us what grace is not. The two great central definitions follow:

"That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7).

This is the inclusive, or affirmative, side; the negative aspect, what grace is not, follows:

"For 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" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

The Jew, who is under the law when grace comes, is under its curse (Gal. 3:10); and the Gentiles are "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

And to this race God comes to show "the exceeding riches of His GRACE in His kindness toward US," "through CHRIST JESUS."

The other great definition of grace is: "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared"- the positive aspect; "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" - the negative aspect.

Grace, then, characterizes the present age, as law characterized the age from Sinai to Calvary. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." And this contrast between law as a method and grace as a method runs through the whole Biblical revelation concerning grace.

It is not, of course, meant that there was no law before Moses, any more than that there was no grace and truth before Jesus Christ. The forbidding to Adam of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17) was law, and surely grace was most sweetly manifested in the seeking, by the Lord God, of His sinning creatures, and in His clothing them with coats of skins (Gen. 3:21) - a beautiful type of Christ "made unto us ... righteousness" (1 Cor. 1:30). Law, in the sense of some revelation of God's will, and grace, in the sense of some revelation of God's goodness, have always existed, and to this Scripture abundantly testifies. But "the law" as an inflexible rule of life was given by Moses, and, from Sinai to Calvary, dominates, characterizes, the time; just as grace dominates, or gives its peculiar character to, the dispensation which begins at Calvary, and has its predicted termination in the rapture of the Church.

**LAW AND GRACE DIVERSE**

It is, however, of the most vital moment to observe that Scripture never, in any dispensation, mingles these two principles. Law always has a place and work distinct and wholly diverse from that of grace. Law is God prohibiting, and requiring (Ex. 20:1, 17); grace is God beseeching, and bestowing (2 Cor. 5:18, 21). Law is a ministry of condemnation (Rom. 3:19); grace, of forgiveness (Eph. 1:7). Law curses (Gal. 3:10); grace redeems from that curse (Gal. 3:1). Law kills (Rom. 7:9, 11); grace makes alive (John 10:10). Law shuts every mouth before God; grace opens every mouth to praise Him. Law puts a great and guilty distance between man and God (Ex. 20:18, 19); grace makes guilty man nigh to God (Eph. 2:13). Law says, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Ex. 21:24); grace says, "Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:39). Laws says, "Hate thine enemy;" grace, "Love your enemies, bless them that despitefully use you." Law says, do and live (Luke 10:26, 28); grace, believe and live (John 5:24). Law never had a missionary; grace is to be preached to every creature. Law utterly condemns the best man ( Phil. 3:4, 9); grace freely justifies the worst (Luke 23:24; Rom. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Cor. 6:9, 11). Law is a system of probation; grace, of favor. Law stones an adulteress (Deut. 22:21); grace says, "Neither do I condemn thee" (John 8:1, 11). Under law the sheep dies for the shepherd; under grace the shepherd dies for the sheep (John 10:11).

The relation to each other of these diverse principles, law and grace, troubled the apostolic church. The first controversy concerned the ceremonial law. It was the contention of the legalists that converts from among the Gentiles could not be saved unless circumcised "after the manner of Moses" (Acts 15:1). This demand was enlarged when the "apostles and elders" had come together at Jerusalem to settle that controversy (Acts 15:5, 6). The demand then made put in issue not circumcision merely, or the ceremonial law, but the whole Mosaic system. "That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:6).

The decision of the council, as "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost," negatived both demands, and the new law of love was invoked that Gentile converts should abstain from things especially offensive to Jewish believers (Acts 15:28, 29).

But the confusion of these two diverse principles did not end with the decision of the council. The controversy continued, and six years later the Holy Spirit, by the Apostle Paul, launched against the legalistic teachers from Jerusalem the crushing thunderbolt of the Epistle to the churches in Galatia.

In this great letter every phase of the question of the respective spheres of law and of grace comes up for discussion and final, authoritative decision.

The Apostle had called the Galatians into the grace of Christ (Gal. 1:6). Now grace means unmerited, unrecompensed favor. It is essential to get this clear. Add never so slight an admixture of law-works, as circumcision, or law effort, as of obedience to commandments, and "grace is no more grace" (Rom. 11:6). So absolutely is this true, that grace cannot even begin with us until the law has reduced us to speechless guilt (Rom. 3:19). So long as there is the slightest question of utter guilt, utter helplessness, there is no place for grace. If I am not, indeed, quite so good as I ought to be, but yet quite too good for hell, I am not an object for the grace of God, but for the illuminating and convicting and death-dealing work of His law.

The law is "just" (Rom. 7:12), and therefore heartily approves goodness, and unsparingly condemns badness; but, save Jesus of Nazareth, the law never saw a man righteous through obedience. Grace, on the contrary, is not looking for good men whom it may approve, for it is not grace, but mere justice, to approve goodness, but it is looking for condemned, guilty, speechless and helpless men whom it may save through faith, sanctify and glorify.

Into grace, then, Paul had called the Galatians. What (1:6) was his controversy with them? Just this: they were "removed" from the grace of Christ into "another gospel," though he is swift to add, "which is not another" (Gal. 1:7). There could not be another "gospel." Change, modify, the grace of Christ by the smallest degree, and you no longer have a gospel. A gospel is "glad tidings"; and the law is not glad tidings. "What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19), and surely that is no good news. The law, then, has but one language; it pronounces " all the world" - "good", bad, and "goody-good" - "guilty".

But you say: What is a simple child of God, who knows no theology, to do? Just this: to remember that any so called gospel which is not pure unadulterated grace is "another" gospel. If it proposes, under whatever specious guise, to win favor of God by works, or goodness, or "character," or anything else which man can do, it is spurious. That is the unfailing test.

But it is more than spurious, it is accursed - or rather the preachers of it are (Gal. 1:8, 9). It is not man who says that, but the Spirit of God who says it by His apostle. This is unspeakably solemn. Not the denial of the Gospel even, is so awfully serious as to pervert the Gospel. Oh, that God may give His people in this day power to discriminate, to distinguish things which differ. Alas, it is discernment which seems so painfully wanting.

If a preacher is cultured, gentle, earnest, intellectual, and broadly tolerant, the sheep of God run after him. He, of course, speaks beautifully about Christ, and uses the old words - redemption, the cross, even sacrifice and atonement - but what is his Gospel? That is the crucial question. Is salvation, perfect, entire, eternal, - justification, sanctification, glory, - the alone work of Christ, and the free gift of God to faith alone? Or does he say: (Dr. Abbott) "Character is salvation," even though he may add that Christ "helps" to form the character?

**THE THREE ERRORS**

In the Epistle to the Galatians the Holy Spirit through Paul meets and answers the three great errors into which in different degrees, theological systems have fallen.

The course of this demonstration is like the resistless march of an armed host. Nothing can stand before it. The reasonings of ancient and modern legalists are scattered like the chaff of the summer threshing floor.

We have, most of us, been reared and now live under the influence of Galatianism. Protestant theology, alas, is for the most part, thoroughly Galatianized, in that neither law nor grace are given their distinct and separated places, as in the counsels of God, but are mingled together in one incoherent system. The law is no longer, as in the Divine intent, a ministration of death (2 Cor. 3:7), of cursing (Gal. 3:10), of conviction (Rom. 3:19), because we are taught that we must try to keep it, and that by Divine help we may. Nor, on the other hand, does grace bring us blessed deliverance from the dominion of sin, for we are kept under the law as a rule of life despite the plain declaration, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

**THE FIRST ERROR**

The Spirit first meets the contention that justification is partly by law-works and partly by faith through grace (Gal. 2:5 to 3:24).

The steps are:

**1.** Even the Jews, who are not like the Gentiles, hopeless, "and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12), but already in covenant relations with God, even they, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:15, 16), have believed; "for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

**2.** The law has executed its sentence upon the believer (Gal. 2:19); death has freed him. Identified with Christ's death by faith, he, in the reckoning of God, died with Christ (Rom. 6:3-10; 7:4).

**3.** But righteousness is by faith, not by law (Gal. 2:21).

**4.** The Holy Spirit is given to faith, not law-works (Gal. 3:1-9).

**5.** "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" - and the reason is given: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). The law, then, cannot "help", but can only do its great and necessary work of condemnation (Rom. 3:19, 20; 2 Cor. 3:7, 9; Gal. 3:19; James 2:10).

Elsewhere (Rom. 5:1-5) the Spirit, by the same Apostle, sums up the results of justification by faith with every semblance of human merit carefully excluded. Grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, has brought the believer into peace with God, a standing in grace, and assured hope of glory. Tribulation can but serve to develop in him new graces. The very love that saved him through grace now fills his heart; the Holy Spirit is given him, and he joys in God. And all by grace, through faith!

**THE SECOND ERROR**

The Spirit next meets and refutes the second great error concerning the relations of law and grace - the notion that the believer, though assuredly justified by faith through grace wholly without law-works, is, after justification, put under law as a rule of life.

This is the current form of the Galatian error. From Luther down, Protestantism has consistently held to justification by faith through grace. Most inconsistently Protestant theology has held to the second form of Galatianism.

An entire section of the Epistle to the Romans, and two chapters of Galatians are devoted to the refutation of this error, and to the setting forth of the true rule of the believer's life. Romans 6, 7, 8, and Galatians 4 and 5, set forth the new Gospel of the believer's standing in grace.

Rom. 6:14 states the new principle: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." The Apostle is not here speaking of the justification of a sinner, but of the deliverance of a saint from the dominion of indwelling sin.

In Galatians, after showing that the law had been to the Jew like the pedagogue in a Greek or Roman household, a ruler of children in their nonage (Gal. 3:23, 24) the Apostle says explicitly (ver. 25), "But after that faith has come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (pedagogue).

No evasion is possible here. The pedagogue is the law (3:24); faith justifies; but the faith which justifies also ends the rule of the pedagogue. Modern theology says that after justification we are under the pedagogue. Here is a clear issue, an absolute contradiction between the Word of God and theology. Which do you side with?

Equally futile is the timorous gloss that this whole profound discussion in Romans and Galatians relates to the ceremonial law. No Gentile could observe the ceremonial law. Even the Jews, since the destruction of the temple, A.D. 70, have not found it possible to keep the ceremonial law except in a few particulars of diet. It is not the ceremonial law which says, "Thou shalt not covet" (comp. Rom. 7:7-9).

The believer is separated by death and resurrection from Mosaism (Rom. 6:3-15; 7:1-6; Gal. 4:19-31). The fact remains immutable that to God he is, as to the law, an executed criminal. Justice has been completely vindicated, and it is no longer possible even to bring an accusation against him (Rom. 8:33, 34).

It is not possible to know Gospel liberty, or Gospel holiness, until this great fundamental truth is clearly, bravely grasped. One may be a Christian and a worthy and useful man, and be still under bondage to the law, but one can never have deliverance from the dominion of sin, nor know the true blessedness and rest of the Gospel and remain under the law. Therefore, once more, note that it is death which has broken the connection between the believer and the law. "The law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth" (Rom. 7:1). "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held" (Rom. 7:6). Nothing can be clearer.

But I hasten to add that there is a mere carnal and fleshly way of looking at our deliverance from the law, which is most unscriptural, and I am persuaded, most dishonoring to God. It consists in rejoicing in a supposed deliverance from the principle of Divine authority over the life - a deliverance into mere self-will and lawlessness.

The true ground of rejoicing is quite other than this. The truth is, a Christian may get on after a sort under law as a rule of life. Not apprehending that the law is anything more than an ideal, he feels a kind of pious complacency in "consenting unto the law that it is good," and more or less languidly hoping that in the future he may succeed better in keeping it than in the past. So treated, the law is wholly robbed of its terror. Like a sword carefully fastened in its scabbard, the law no longer cuts into the conscience. It is forgotten that the law offers absolutely but two alternatives - exact obedience, always, in all things, or a curse. There is no third voice. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10; James 2:10). The law has but one voice: "What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). The law, in other words, never says: "Try to do better next time." Of this the antinomian legalist seems entirely unaware.

**THE TRUE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

And now we are ready to turn from the negative to the positive side to the secret of a holy and victorious walk under grace.

We shall find the principle and the power of that walk defined in Galatians 5:16-24. The principle of the walk is briefly stated:

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh" (5:16).

The Spirit is shown in Galatians in a threefold way. First, He is received by the hearing of faith (3:2). When the Galatians believed they received the Spirit. To what end? The legalists make little of the Spirit. Though they talk much of "power" in connection with the Spirit, it is power for service which chiefly occupies them. Of His sovereign rights, of His blessed enabling in the inner life, there is scant apprehension. But it is precisely there that the Biblical emphasis falls. In Romans, for example, the Spirit is not even mentioned until we have a justified sinner trying to keep the law, utterly defeated in that attempt by the flesh, the "law in his members," and crying out, not for help, but for deliverance (Rom. 7:15-24). Then the Spirit is brought in with, Oh, what marvelous results! "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). Not the Apostle's effort under the law, nor even the Spirit's help in that effort, but the might of the indwelling Spirit alone, breaks the power of indwelling sin (Gal. 5:16-18).

You ask, and necessarily at this point, what is it to walk in the Spirit? The answer is in Gal. 5:18: "If ye be led of the Spirit." But how else may we be led of Him save by yieldedness to His sway?

There is a wonderful sensitiveness in the blessed Spirit's love. He will not act in and over our lives by way of almightiness, forcing us into conformity. That is why "yield" is the great word of Romans 6, where it is expressly said that we are not under the law, but under grace.

The results of walking in the Spirit are twofold, negative and positive. Walking in the Spirit we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). The "flesh" here is the exact equivalent of "sin" in Romans 6:14, "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

And the reason is immediately given (5:17). The Spirit and the flesh are contrary, and the Spirit is greater and mightier than the flesh. Deliverance comes, not by self-effort under the law - that is Romans 7 - but by the omnipotent Spirit, who Himself is contrary to the flesh (Gal. 6:7), and who brings the yielded believer into the experience of Romans 8.