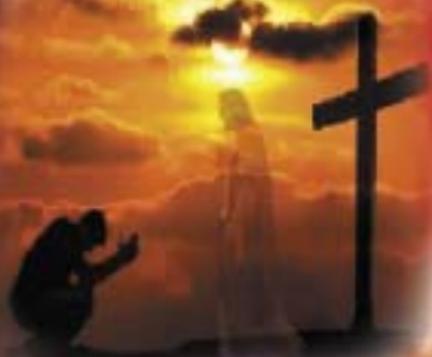


**THE FREEDOM OF GRACE**

**versus**

**THE BONDAGE OF LAW**



**Obedient Response To Grace  
For Freedom From The Bondage  
Of Sin And Religious Inventions**

**DICKSON**

## **THE FREEDOM OF GRACE VERSUS THE BONDAGE OF LAW**

Since God is love, then of necessity He must be a God of grace. God the Holy Spirit thus wrote through the guided hand of an apostle, “*For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace*” (Rm 6:14). This statement, as well as others that are married to this theme of the book of *Romans*, is always perplexing for those, who through meritorious law-keeping, still have an urge to justify themselves before this God of love.

But this is not how it works with a God who is identified by love. This was the mental and behavioral challenge that faced the early Jewish Christians. Salvation by faith in the grace of God was at first a glorious reality in the hearts of most in their relationship with their Creator. But a decade or two after the initial rejoicing, there was creeping into the thinking of some disciples a theology that would destroy the very foundation upon which the early

Christians initially stood. The Holy Spirit saw the threat, and subsequently delivered *Romans* and *Galatians* to the church in order to save the church from going into the oblivion of just another religion.

- **Saving grace:** In order to apply the above statement of Romans 6:14 to our relationship with God through law, it must first be noted that in the Greek text of the verse the Greek article “the” was intentionally not placed in the text by the Holy Spirit in reference to law. It was not so placed just in case some might conclude that Paul was speaking specifically about “the law,” that is, the Sinai law. In order that some not come to this erroneous conclusion, he wanted to emphasize the fact that there is no law under which we could live by which we could save ourselves. Indeed, and in reference to his specific argument against the meritorious keeping of the Sinai law, this was true in reference to the Jews who lived under the Sinai law. It is likewise true in reference to Christians who are living under grace. Unfortunately, the Jews’ adherence to the ordinances of the Sinai law in order to justify themselves before God was futile. It was this theology that was finding its way into the first century church.

But this is not Paul's specific meaning by his intentional use of the word "law" without the article in the text of Romans 6:14. His point was that Christians in general, regardless of whether they were Jews or Gentiles, are not under any system of law by which they can, through law alone, justify themselves before God.

(This argument is brought out in another verse to which we will refer later. We must be cautious, therefore, with those translations that insert in the text the definite article "the," when reference, both in *Romans* and *Galatians*, is to "law." In general, sometimes the article is used, but it is used in those cases where the context is an argument against salvation through law-keeping. But when the article is dropped, the argument is that there can never be any self-justification before God on the basis of perfect law-keeping.)

- **Struggling with grace:** By the time God's grace was revealed through the incarnate Son of God two thousand years ago, the Jews had for centuries before lived under the bondage of their own self-imposed religiosity. They supposed that ac-

ceptance by God was based on the foundation of how well they performed the statutes of the Sinai law, as well as their added religious rites and ceremonies, which eventually they observed to the exclusion of the Sinai law (See Mk 7:1-9). Therefore, when the gospel of the grace of God was finally revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ, most Jews found it very difficult to comprehend grace. They simply could not shift the responsibility for their own salvation from themselves to someone who was crucified with thieves on a cross outside Jerusalem.

The same is true today in a religious world where every imaginable religious order has been constructed in order for faithful adherents to self-justify themselves before God. And in the religious world where Jesus Christ plays no part in the theology of millions of adherents, obedience to religious rites, rituals and ceremonies run rampant. In fact, such non-Christian religions are often identified by the outward performance of their unique religious rites, rituals and ceremonies.

By the time the incarnate Son of God was re-

vealed in Bethlehem, the Jewish religious leaders of the day had “re-scriptured” their own relationship with God. Their relationship with God was based on their meritorious obedience to the Sinai law, as well as the religious traditions of the fathers. They justified their self-justification through their twisted interpretations of the Sinai law, which interpretations were combined with an assortment of religious traditions to which they strictly adhered. Judaism, or the Jews’ religion, subsequently became a quagmire of religiosity by the time Jesus arrived on the scene (See Gl 1:13,14). Subsequently, self-righteous Jews deceived themselves into believing that they had a salvational relationship with God that was based solely on their performance of the Sinai law, plus all their added rites and ceremonies. They were somewhat arrogant about their religiosity, taking every opportunity to criticize Jesus for breaking their religious traditions.

- **The origin of religion:** It was true that the Sinai covenant was continued active in Israel through the Israelites’ obedience to the accompanying Sinai law. However, and as all those who become ignorant of the law, the urge for self-justi-

fication became a part of the Jews' religiosity once they set aside the purpose for which the Sinai law was given.

The same is true today in reference to the law of Christ. Many people today are as the Jews of old. They too have given up a knowledge of the word of God (See Hs 4:6). Since many people today have given up a knowledge of the New Testament word of Christ, but at the same time seek to remain religious, they have constructed all sorts of religious behavior in order to feel justified before God. Whether Jews or Christians, at least one very important lesson is learned from all this religious confusion. **No matter what century in which we live, there are always those who have convinced themselves that they are right with God on the basis of their own religious performances. Jesus saw this coming** (Read Mt 7:21-23).

Many religious leaders today are no different than the religious leaders of Jesus' day. For example, the religious leaders of the Jews sought to guarantee the keeping of the Sabbath law by adding numerous amendments to the original Sabbath

law. In order to honor the Sabbath, therefore, the Jewish religionists of the day imposed on the people their own self-justifying Sabbath behavior in order to guarantee that the Sabbath was strictly honored. For example, the “Sabbath-day journey,” which journey is found nowhere in the Sinai law, was an imposed “law” that was to be obeyed in order to guarantee that one obey the Sabbath.

Today, the same is true in reference to the faith of many religionists. In order to be considered faithful, religious performances, especially surrounding assemblies, are orchestrated in order that all attendees walk away from the assembly feeling good, thinking that now after the “closing prayer,” they are justified before God.

The Jews of Jesus’ time were no different in attaching self-imposed laws (religious rites and ceremonies) to the original Sinai law. However, the religious leaders of the Jews forgot, in reference to the Sabbath, that “*the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*” (Mk 2:27). Those who use law as a means of self-justification always view law as an avenue through which one can stand

just before God. In other words, some Jews kept the Sabbath in order to maintain a salvational relationship with God. The keeping of the Sabbath, however, was meant to be a sign of their covenant with God, not as a means by which they would justify themselves from sin. Legalists always view justification through law-keeping, not through faith in the grace of God. In reference to ourselves today, many Christians keep certain rites and ceremonies on Sunday morning in order to be justified before God. We thus preach grace, but bring ourselves under our own self-justification through Sunday law-keeping. We must simply remember that we are already justified before we show up on Sunday morning. In fact, we show up at the assembly because we are justified, not in order to be justified.

It is the same with the assortment of religious traditions that we witness today among so many religious groups throughout the world. It is supposed that obedience to all the religious rites and ceremonies of each particular religious group will make the adherents justified before God. The rites and ceremonies are thus perpetuated in order to make the adherents feel that they are justified before God

on the basis of law-keeping. However, we must never forget that self-imposed human religious rites and ceremonies, even the keeping of God's laws, can never profit as a means of self-justification in reference to our acceptance by God. Law cannot be the answer for a stable relationship with God simply because we are all law breakers (Rm 3:9-11). Though law is good and holy, it still reveals sin in our lives for which there is no human solution (Rm 7:12-14).

Keeping all our religious rites and ceremonies may present before others a facade of religiosity, or even lead us into deceiving ourselves that we are righteous in obedience to law. But such religiosity is of no benefit in reference to our justification. This is true simply because the Holy Spirit said it was true: *“For by works of law no flesh will be justified”* (Gl 2:16).

If we seek grace through law-keeping, and the added performance of our own rites and ceremonies, then we are spiritually dead in the water. Paul wrote, *“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested ... even the righteousness*

of God that is by the faith of Jesus Christ” (Rm 3:21,22). This of necessity is true because “*there is none righteous, no, not one*” (Rm 3:10). We are all continual sinners.

In our frustration to live perfectly in reference to law, all honest people will confess as Paul, “*Therefore, has that which is good [law] become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might be manifested to be sin [through law], was working death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful*” (Rm 7:13). So Paul concluded, “*For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold into bondage to sin*” (Rm 7:14).

The more we come to the reality that we are forever doomed to the bondage of sin, the more we are driven to grace. Therefore, recognition that the law of God reveals sin in our lives drives us to grace. If we are honest with ourselves, law is indirectly a driving force to grace because we realize, as Paul, that we are all lawbreakers, and thus, held in the bondage of sin because we cannot keep law perfectly in order to deliver ourselves. This is what

Paul meant when he wrote, “*For without law, I was once alive. But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died*” (Rm 7:9).

In the context of this point we might conclude that if law reveals sin in our lives, then it would be good to live without law. But Paul wrote, “*I would not have known sin except through law*” (Rm 7:7). It may seem to be a glorious theology to believe that we are not under law. Or, we might be as the antinomian who believes that we are saved by faith alone, regardless of any obedience to moral or social law.

But the theology of antinomianism (faith only) leads one into bondage. Though we might believe that there is no law by which we should live, our sense of religiosity would still drive us to create our own scriptures of “law.” **We would invent laws to guarantee that we were not under law.**

Of course, such thinking is quite hypocritical and thus self-contradictory. The fact is still true that God’s law **brings freedom**. It frees us from bringing ourselves into the bondage of our own self-

imposed laws, while deceiving ourselves into thinking that we are right with God on the basis of our own religious inventions. Therefore, as a charter of freedom, Paul wrote, “*The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*” (Rm 7:12).

As all religious leaders who impose obedience to human religious rites and ceremonies, the Jewish religious leaders reversed the order of obedience, and thus contradicted the very purpose for the law of the Sabbath. They made the Sabbath, and the keeping of their assortment of attached laws associated with it, the means by which one would be judged a faithful “Sabbath keeper.”

Instead of a day of rest for the people, the Sabbath, with the added assortment of over one hundred rites that surrounded the Sabbath, was relegated to a show of religiosity. Keeping the Sabbath, therefore, became an attempted means of self-justification before God when combined with all the man-invented religious rites that surrounded the Sabbath.

The same takes place in the religious world today with those who have little or no knowledge of

the word of Christ. This is often the reason why assembly-defined “Christianity” has become so popular. We identify the church by the performance of fulfilled laws that take place on Sunday morning between an opening and closing prayer. All such behavior is often promoted by religious leaders who view grace through law. Theirs is thus a distorted message no different than the Sabbath zealots who confronted Jesus.

- **Viewing grace through law:** Whatever understanding the Jews had of grace while living under the Sinai law, **grace was eventually viewed through law-keeping.** This belief and behavior was specifically identified also by their keeping of all the traditions that they produced to surround the Sabbath. To many Jews at the time of Jesus, therefore, grace was activated in one’s life, not only by keeping the Sinai law in reference to the Sabbath, but also keeping all the traditions of the fathers that were connected to the Sabbath. If one sinned against any of the attached “laws,” which all Jews knew they did, then atoning good works would sanctify one of law violations. In view of sin, and in order to keep the law perfectly, the religious leaders in-

stituted their own assortment of laws (traditions) in order to make sure that the Sinai law, including the Sabbath, was obeyed.

They thus worked in order that God have pleasure in them, not because they realized that God already had pleasure in them because of His loving grace. They sought to live as the returning prodigal son in order that the father allow him to be counted only as one of the servants in the field (Lk 15:18,19) The prodigal had simply forgotten that by grace he was already an heir because he was a child of the father. He could not work himself back into his father's grace because he was already there. He could not work for that which he already had as a son of his father. The same is true of us as God's children, "*and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*" (Rm 8:17). How much better can it get!

• **Nit-picking legalists:** The statement of Jesus in Mark 2:27 was made in the context of what He and His disciples did on the Sabbath in reference to picking and eating the grain of a field through which they had just walked (Mk 2:23). In reference to

what Jesus and His disciples did with the grain of the field, the Pharisees accused Jesus, “*Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath*” (Mk 2:24). They were nit-picking in reference to their own restrictions, not because of some violation of the Sinai law.

What the disciples were doing in reference to eating grain was lawful according to the Sinai law. If one were on a journey, and according to the Sinai law, he had a right to eat the grain of a field as he passed through the field, though he could not put a sickle to the crop. But this act is not what motivated the Pharisees to make the accusation against the disciples. The Pharisees accused Jesus and the disciples of doing the simple task of picking out the grain so they could eat it. Unfortunately, the nit-picking Pharisees interpreted this to be work on the Sabbath. But it was not.

The Pharisees viewed their relationship with God through the strict obedience of their interpretations of the law, not through grace. Since they had elevated their interpretations of the law to the same authority as God’s law, if one disobeyed their

interpretations, then it was the same as disobedience to God’s law. And in the case of the disciples extracting grain so they could eat it, according to the religious leaders at the time, such was “not lawful on the Sabbath.”

So in the immediate context of the situation, Jesus reminded the religious leaders of the example of David when he, in his flight from the murderous hand of Saul, was at the point of starvation. David subsequently went into the tabernacle of God and ate the showbread, which bread under the Sinai law, was to be eaten only by the priests (Lv 24:5-9; 1 Sm 21:6; Mk 2:26). But because David was under grace at the time, he did not sin. He was to be preserved as the future king of Israel. The higher law that he survive released him from the law that only the priests could eat the showbread.

But if we view David not sinning on this occasion against law—which thing even the Pharisees believed—then Jesus’ lesson is that **law must be viewed through grace**. However, if we reverse this order in reference to our understanding of grace, and view grace through law, then David sinned. We

are thus susceptible to keep adding to God's laws one statute after another, precept upon precept, in order that God's law be obeyed perfectly (See Is 28:10). If we get involved in this statute-adding religiosity, one day we will wake up and find ourselves in a religion that has no room for grace. When a group of people bring themselves into conforming to a legal system of religious laws they have collected together over the years into a catechism, they have brought themselves into the bondage of law-keeping (traditions).

It is also evident that some of the Jews thought that they were within an "inherited grace." Because they were the chosen people, they thought that their salvation was inherent in the fact that they were born Jewish, and thus, born into a realm of grace from which they could not fall. The fact that they were in a national covenant relationship with God is true (See Jr 31:31-34). However, their national covenant relationship with God did not assume that individual Jews were inherently covered by the grace of God. The fact that we must all stand before the judgment of God individually, assumes that we all must individually live in response to the grace of God.

Christians must be careful not to assume that “being a member of the church” inherently guarantees that we will be saved by grace. If we think this, then we will often establish an identity of the church that is based on certain beliefs and performances of law and traditions. We will then conclude that our adherence to such laws and traditions of the church guarantees that we are standing in the grace of God. However, we must always remember that a church of people saves no one. On the contrary, **the church is composed of those who are saved by their faith in the grace of God.** It is our response to the cross, not our adherence to the catechisms of a church of people, that guarantees our salvation.

It is from this system of religion that only the gospel of grace can set us free. Unfortunately, some in their religiosity are so far removed from grace that they are having a difficult time understanding the very nature of grace. This was the problem with the majority of the Jews in the first century, and thereafter. It is the problem of religious people today who are in the bondage of their own religiosity, feeling that they are never good enough for God.

Well, surprise! None of us is “good,” for outside grace there is not one good person who has ever lived on this planet. “*There is no one that does good, no, not one*” (Rm 3:12).

- **Grace deliverance:** For Christians who are under grace, Paul made a reassuring statement in Romans 6:14. In view of the religious predicament into which the Jewish religious leaders had brought themselves—idolatrous religions were of the same nature—Paul affirmed that grace delivers us from the presumption that we can justify ourselves before God by keeping all the precepts that we believe are necessary in order to be obedient to the law of God. Grace delivers us to the point that Paul wrote the following words to the Gentile Christians of Galatia. These Christians were threatened by Jewish Christians who had not yet delivered themselves from meritorious law-keeping in order to live in a relationship with God: “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

At least two things are crystal clear in the pre-

ceding statement: First, **bondage** is living under any system of law, whether of Jewish origin or our own self-imposed rites and ceremonies, that we believe supposedly guarantees our salvation if obeyed perfectly. Law is bondage simply because no one can keep law perfectly in order to save himself. This does not mean that we are not living under the law of God. It simply means that we self-righteously cannot keep law perfectly in order to save ourselves.

Paul's second point, therefore, is that the gospel sets us free from the necessity of keeping law perfectly in order to save ourselves. In fact, the Holy Spirit started His thesis to the Galatians by stating that if we proclaim the gospel, but attach to the gospel all our religious rites and ceremonies, then we are actually preaching another gospel (Gl 1:6-9). It is "a gospel" of bondage.

Those who approach grace through law cannot understand what the Holy Spirit just said in Galatians 5:1. They cannot understand because they have brought themselves into the bondage of their own self-justifying performances and religious tra-

ditions. This performance-oriented religiosity is almost always revealed in the ceremonies of the assemblies of each particular religious group. In other words, unless prescribed assembly performances on the first day of the week are strictly carried out according to the “traditions of the fathers,” then the assembled adherents are behaving outside the grace of God. It is supposed that there is no grace for those who seek to change some order in the ceremonies of the assembly.

During such legal-oriented assemblies, it is often stated in a “closing prayer,” “If we have been found faithful,” that is, faithful in obedience to all self-imposed, cult-like assembly performances in order to stand justified before God. This is the prayer of those who view grace through law-keeping, specifically their successful legal performance of assembly rituals and ceremonies. Such folks are living in their own self-imposed bondage. They do not understand the liberty that grace brings. They have judged David for violating law, and thus he must spit out the priests’ bread lest he be condemned. He must do as the disciples and “come forward,” confessing his sin of eating the priests’ lunch.

- **Faith in the grace of God:** In our self-reliance to stand on our own performances of law, we forget that we stand righteous before God **because of our faith in the gospel of grace** that was revealed through Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, we have this urge to reassure our relationship with God on the foundation of our own meritorious performance of law.

There were those in the church of Rome who were of such thinking. Their misguided faith in themselves to perform law in a manner by which they would justify themselves, clouded their faith in the grace of God. Their viewing grace through the legal performance of law was leading the church into bondage. So Paul concluded his arguments against such thinking in *Romans* by stating that we are justified by faith, not by our meritorious performance of works of law: “*And if by grace [we are saved], then it is no more by works [of merit or perfect law-keeping], otherwise grace is no more grace [in reference to our salvation]*” (Rm 11:6).

If we were saved by our performance of works of law, then there would be no need for grace. We

would put God in debt to save us on the merit of our performance of law (See Rm 4:4). This was the fatal error of the legal-oriented religious leaders of Jesus' day. Subsequently, they were in search of those who did not wash their hands after coming from the market (Mk 7:5), even someone who would heal on the Sabbath (Mk 3:2), and the grain pluckers who still had pieces of grain stuck in their teeth (Lk 6:1,2). We have the same self-appointed judges among us today. They are still looking for different violations, and thus they are still a gestapo of legal judges moving among the sheep.

So in view of the preceding, what part does the law of God play in reference to our salvation? By the time Paul had, in his grace document, arrived at Romans 11, he had already settled this matter. He had previously argued, "*We conclude that a man is justified by faith **apart from the works of law***" (Rm 3:28).

**Our salvation is by our faith in the grace of God**, not in our ability to flawlessly perform law. We must not miss the point that the Greek article "the" **is not** in the text of Romans 3:28 in reference

to law. Therefore, Paul's argument is that we are justified by our faith in the grace of God apart from any system of law we might invent or seek to perfectly perform, or even so use the law of Christ.

In view of the fact that we are not justified by law, Paul then asked, "*Do we then make void law through faith?*" (Rm 3:31). This would be the natural conclusion that self-justifying legalists would make against those who would stand firm on God's grace. But Paul retorted, "*Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law*" (Rm 3:31) And herein is the serendipity of faith. **We obey our Father because of our faith in His grace, by which grace He has already saved us through the sacrificial offering of His Son. This is good news!**

Our salvation, therefore, can never be by a simple inactive faith, **but by a living faith that responds to the grace of God.** We can never, therefore, be saved by faith alone. James made this perfectly clear when he wrote, "*You see then that a man is justified by works [of faith] and not by faith only*" (Js 2:24). Likewise, we can never be saved by grace alone. On the contrary, it is only by our

faith in the grace of God that we can be saved, for our faith must be responsive in reference to the gospel of God's grace.

- **Our faith; God's righteousness:** Paul's argument in Romans 3:31 is based on the fact **that our faith establishes obedience to the law of our Father. Faith in the grace of God inspires obedience.** We must never reverse this order. It can never be that we obey law in hope that we are "found faithful." The fact is that we are considered faithful by God through His grace, not because of our performance of His law.

This is the interpretation of what Paul wrote in reference to the religious leaders of Israel who found assurance in their own meritorious performance of law and obedience to their added religious rites and ceremonies. Concerning such religionists, Paul wrote, "*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness [grace] and seeking to establish their own righteousness [through the performance of law and their own religious rites and ceremonies], have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God [that was revealed through the gospel of the incarnate*

Son of God]” (Rm 10:3).

Jesus was nailed to the cross to destroy the Jews’ order of establishing a self-righteous relationship with God. Christians have been justified fully by the cross. There need be no subsidizing performance of law-keeping in order to supplement this grace. In other words, because Christians have realized the grace that was revealed at the cross, **they are motivated to obey their loving Father who offered His only begotten Son for their justification.** Christians dare not reverse this order, lest they be, as the Jewish religious leaders, seeking to justify themselves through their own perfect obedience of law, with the added guarantee of meritorious religious performances. In reference to Christians, this should be a warning not to establish some system of legal-oriented assemblies by which they would seek to justify themselves before God.

- **The foundation of grace:** It is upon the foundation of viewing law through grace that statements as the following were made by the Holy Spirit: *“We have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of*

*law, for by works of law no flesh will be justified*” (Gl 2:16). When the Holy Spirit declared, “*for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared*” (Ti 2:11). He meant that this grace that was revealed through the faith of the crucified Son of God, was the end of any and all attempts on our part to be justified before God through any meritorious law-keeping.

It is in this context that Paul wrote, “*For all things [in reference to salvation] are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God*” (2 Co 4:15). This is the point. This is the heart of discipleship because it reveals the heart of God. It is the motivating power of grace that causes obedience to God. This is the power of the gospel that drives individuals to the waters of baptism in order to be sanctified of all sins for which atonement was made at the cross. This is why the repentant believer “dies with Christ,” is subsequently buried in a tomb of water, and then “raised with Christ” (See Rm 6:3-6).

One is baptized, therefore, not simply in obedi-

ence to law, though baptism is a command (At 2:38). It is a signal of something greater. One is baptized because he or she has been taught the gospel, which is the revelation of the heart of God to humanity. **The power of this gospel was subsequently released in the life of the one who was caused, by thanksgiving, to give his or her life in response to the heart of God.** It is for this reason that baptism should never be relegated to an act of simply obedience to a command. **Baptism must be a faith response of hope in the life of the one who understands the revelation of the heart of God in the sacrificial offering of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary.**

We would not, through our own meritorious performance of law, marginalize this understanding of God's grace that was revealed at the cross. We encourage one to be baptized in response to grace, not in order to simply obey law. Therefore, it is as Paul wrote, "*For the love of Christ [on the cross] compels us, because we judge that if one died for all, then all died*" (2 Co 5:14).

If we can understand this concept in reference

to grace and law, then it will change our entire perspective of being a Christian. Unfortunately, many of the Jews in the first century just “got baptized.” And because they came out of a very strict performance-oriented religion that viewed grace through law-keeping, they sought to also impose meritorious law-keeping on the early Gentile disciples. For such Jewish folks, if there had been more of a compelling response from grace in obedience to the gospel in baptism, then there would have been less compelling of the Gentile Christians that they must submit to certain Jewish traditions and laws in order to guarantee their salvation (See At 15:1).

The Holy Spirit saw this as such a grave problem and denial of the gospel, that He inspired both *Romans* and *Galatians* to be written by a former Jewish religionist who finally saw the difference between grace and self-justification, and thus made the change in his own relationship with God. We must do the same. So as soon as we witness those who would bring us into the bondage of their own self-imposed religious traditions, we will stand up and confront the same with the statement of the Holy Spirit: “We are not under law, but under grace.”

## Epilogue

I must confess that when I started working myself through the subject of grace in order to write a short editorial, I did not at first realize that we can never be brief in our study of grace. Therefore, in my efforts to remain brief, the final outcome was a book, that will be published later. As I prayed many times over the subject, and kept allowing *Romans* and *Galatians* to speak to me, the once brief editorial turned into a document. It grew because of the nature of the subject, and its centrality to all that Christians believe. If there were no grace, then there would be no such thing as Christianity.

Once one submerges himself/herself into the aroma of God's grace, there is no end to the marvelous revelation of the character of the God of love in whom we believe. One of the greatest evidences for the existence of the God of the Bible is that His nature is that which is so desired by His creation. Those degenerate religions of the world that prey on their fellow man, have their concept of a god. But their concept of their god is far removed from the God of love and grace that we discover between Genesis 1 and Revelation 22. In fact, there is no culture of the world throughout history that has come up with a concept of God that is greater than the God of love and grace that is revealed in the Bible.

Therefore, when studying the subject of grace, one begins to understand that the God of love can never be a fabrication of the minds of the most imaginative people among us. It is only this God who can satisfy all our frustration with ourselves in our futile efforts to relate with Him. Because we try to fabricate theological dictates and religious demonstrations that would bring some relief to our frustration to relate with One who is far beyond our imagination, we find quiet solitude only in the fact that His matchless grace covers all our ineptitude to create forgiveness for ourselves.

Grace moves our God to overlook all our self-righteous foolish-

ness we conjure up with self-imposed religious schemes of reconciliation. When we finally come to the conclusion that there is no way that we can work ourselves into His graces, then we realize that it can only be His way.

In the frustration of our religious narcissism, we must eventually be humbled to the fact that He, not ourselves, is the center of the universe. When we exhaust ourselves in trying to be somewhat righteous before Him, our feeble attempts at self-righteousness are embarrassed by His free righteousness that comes to us through His marvelous grace. It took only one drop of blood from a cross to reveal our self-righteous ineptitude.

The self-righteous religionist should bar himself from a study this subject lest he discover that all the religious ceremonies and performances that he would offer to God are but filthy rags in the presence of a loving God who looks down on us with a heart of love. Most of the time, unfortunately, we must first exhaust ourselves with our own religiosity before we can be humbled by His righteousness.

Sometimes the foolishness of our own religiosity is revealed in all those filthy rags that lie at the foot of the cross of His Son. Our gracious God will allow us to try to wipe ourselves clean with our own self-righteous rags. But when we realize that our rags are so filthy that they simply smear around sin over our souls, it is then that we realize that only incarnational blood will wash us clean.

We are truly grieved that it took an incarnational offering of God Himself in order for us to come to some comprehension of this loving reality that we call grace. But this is exactly what a God of love would be constrained to do for His creation. Grace would not allow Him to exist in the far recesses of the universe.

In order to illustrate that we cannot be left alone to our own moral devices, the pre-flood civilization of mankind proved that it is not within ourselves to direct our own ways. Therefore, God had to

give hope to a post-flood civilization that He would eventually invade our unique world of existence by being like us. He would come into our realm in order to suffer like us, and then with the echo of a reverberating hammer driving a nail into a cross outside Jerusalem, proclaim throughout the universe His emotion for us: "I love you." With such awesome revealed love, He cannot help but welcome us back into His fellowship after we have strayed so far from Him.

So we are back, realizing that He never left. If by chance you are still out there trying to wash yourself clean by the same old self-righteous filthy rags, it is my prayer that these thoughts will inspire you to seek in His Road Map a way back to where you can wash yourself clean in the blood of the incarnate Lamb of God.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philip-  
pians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1  
Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James  
- **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**,  
Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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