



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 on the basis of perfect keeping of law.

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.

1. Saving grace:

In order to apply the above principle 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**” does not appear before the word “law.” Some translators, unfortunately, have placed the article in the text. However, it **was not** placed in the Greek text by the Holy Spirit 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, our inability to keep law perfectly was true in reference to the Jews who lived under the Sinai law. It is likewise true in reference to Christians who are now living under grace. Unfortunately, the Jews’ legal 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.

It is impossible for one to save himself through perfect obedience of law simply because no one can keep law perfectly.

Paul’s specific proposition by his intentional use of the word “**law**” **without the article** in the text of Romans 6:14 was to reveal that before God no one can save himself solely through obedience of law. 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 through perfect law-keeping.

(This argument is brought out in another verse to which we will later refer. 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 simply to “law” in general. However, sometimes the article is used, but it is used in those cases where the context is an argument against salvation through law-keeping, specifically to any ordinance of the Sinai law. 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.)

2. 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. Some supposed that acceptance 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 itself (See Mk 7:1-9). Therefore, when the gospel of the grace of God was finally revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ, most Jews, who sought to justify themselves before God through their own self-imposed traditions, found it very difficult to comprehend the concept of grace. They simply could not shift the responsibility for their 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 of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism where Jesus Christ plays no part in the theology of millions of adherents, obedience to religious rites, rituals and ceremonies is the norm. In fact, such non-Christian religions are often identified by the outward performance of their unique religious rites, rituals and ceremonies.

A cult is defined by the adherents' strict observance of all the catechisms that define the cult.

By the time the incarnate Son of God was revealed 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 numerous religious traditions that they had elevated to the status of law. They subsequently promoted their religiosity of 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 religious traditions 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 supposed salvational relationship with God that was based solely on their performance of the Sinai law. Strict adherence to their religious traditions that they had elevated to the status of law, was supposedly a guarantee of their justification before God. They were thus somewhat arrogant about their religiosity in law-keeping, taking every opportunity to criticize Jesus for breaking their religious traditions.

We know that religious traditions have been elevated to the status of law when those, who set themselves forth as policemen of the traditions in a particular religion, judge others for not keeping the traditions of the religion.

3. The origin of religion:

It was true that the Sinai covenant was continued active in Israel through the Israelites' obedience to the Sinai law. However, and as all those who become ignorant of the law, the urge for self-justification became a part of the Jews' religiosity once they set aside the purpose for which the Sinai law was originally given.

The Jews' religious traditions, therefore, became absolutely necessary when they forgot the original purpose of the Sinai law, and often, the very statutes of the law. What statutes they did remember were surrounded with traditional orders of behavior in order that there be a guaranteed adherence to the Sinai law.

The same is true today in reference to the law of Christ. Many people today are as the Jews of old. In many cases, people today have also 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 the Jews in the first century or Christians today, 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 performing their own religious traditions.** 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 surrounding the original Sabbath law with numerous amendments of the 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 original Sinai law, was an imposed "law" that was to be obeyed in order to guarantee that one obeyed the Sabbath.

Today, the same is true in reference to the religiosity of many people. In order to be considered faithful, religious perfor-

mances, especially surrounding the assemblies of each particular group, 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.

When the assembly of any group becomes the identity of the group, then the adherents should realize that they have established a religion that is identified by assemblies, not by their obedience and behavior of the gospel.

4. Attaching law to law:

The Jews of Jesus’ time were no different than ourselves in attaching self-imposed laws (religious rites and ceremonies) to the original 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 a means by which they would justify themselves from sin (See Ex 31:13). The Sabbath was set aside as a day of rest for the people, not as a day of worship.

The self-righteous always view justification through law-keeping. 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 from the pulpits, but bring ourselves into the bondage of our own self-justification through obedience to a prescribed order of religious ceremonies. We must simply remember that we are already justified by grace **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 deem 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 their perfect obedience of the rites and ceremonies.

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**. Law cannot be the answer for a consistent relationship with God simply because **we are all law breakers** (Rm 3:9-11). Though law is just, good and holy, it still reveals sin in our lives for which there is no human solution (Rm 7:12-14).

When we consider our particular religious rites and ceremonies, who will stand forth and be the judge as to which are right and which are questionable, if not contrary to the established identity of church. In the first century, the Jews had a religious police force of scribes and Pharisees whose job it was to maintain the legal order of religious behavior among the people. Today, it is certain that we have the same who "come out of Jerusalem" in order to make judgments concerning the teaching of John the Baptist.

It is by God's grace that we can live free of guilt because we know that we cannot keep His law perfectly.

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. Therefore, our religiosity in itself 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).

5. No righteous people:

If we seek to earn grace through law-keeping, and thus guarantee payment by God through our added performances of rites, ceremonies and good works, 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, regardless of our superficial self-righteousness in the performance of law. It seems that some have forgotten what the Holy Spirit said through Paul in Romans 4:4: “*Now to him who works [in order to earn his salvation], the reward is not credited according to grace, but according to debt.*”

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 without grace, **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 were honest with ourselves, then we would understand that 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. We are held in bondage 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).

Law reveals that we must be saved by grace because we cannot keep any law perfectly in order to save ourselves.

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 laws of God.

But the theology of antinomianism (faith only) actually 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.** The curse of those who believe that we are not under God’s law is that in maintaining some identity of their faith, they must establish for themselves religious codes and catechisms that would identify their faith.

Of course, such thinking is quite hypocritical, and thus 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 believing that we are right with God on the basis of our own religious inventions. Therefore, as a charter statement of freedom, Paul wrote, *“**The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good**”* (Rm 7:12).

God's law is holy, just and good because it delivers us from the bondage of establishing our own religious laws.

6. Reversing the order:

As all religious leaders who impose obedience to human religious rites and ceremonies, the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day had reversed the order of obedience, and thus contradicted the very purpose of the Sinai law on 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 the Jews surrounded the Sabbath, was relegated to a show of religiosity. Keeping the Sabbath, therefore, became an attempted means of self-justification before God. When the Sabbath was combined with all the invented religious rites that surrounded the Sabbath, then one could boast that he was a faithful Sabbath-keeper.

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. However, when we identify the church by the performance of fulfilled religious rites and ceremonies on Sunday morning, between an opening and closing prayer, then we have a flawed definition of God's people.

All such performed assembly rites and ceremonies are often promoted by religious leaders who view grace through their obedience to their legal assembly ceremonies. Theirs is thus a distorted message that is no different than the Sabbath-keeping zealots who confronted Jesus about His violations of their Sabbath rites and ceremonies.

Our definition of church by obedience to prescribed assembly rites and rituals on Sunday morning relegates the members' faith to an empty, and often spiritually sterile, if not emotionless, legal performance of assembly rules during the supposed "hour of worship."

7. Viewing grace through law:

Whatever understanding the Jews had of grace while living under the Sinai law, grace was eventually viewed through meritorious law-keeping. This belief and behavior was specifically identified also by their keeping of all the traditions that they produced over the years that surrounded 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 by keeping all the traditions of the fathers that surrounded the Sabbath.** If one sinned against any of the attached "laws," which all Jews knew they did, then atoning good works could be offered in order to sanctify oneself of his violations of the law. In view of sin, and in order to keep the law perfectly, the religious leaders thus instituted their own assortment of laws (traditions) in order to make sure that the Sinai law, including the Sabbath, was obeyed.

The self-righteous Jews were motivated by meritorious obedience to earn the grace of God, not realizing that God already had pleasure in them because of His loving grace. Unfortunately, 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 son 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!

Once one obeys the gospel, he or she becomes a child of God, and thus lives within the realm of God's grace.

8. Nit-picking legalists:

Jesus stated, "*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*" (Mk 2:27). This statement was made in the context of what Jesus 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 religious leaders in reference to their own restrictions concerning the Sabbath. They were so, not because of some violation of the Sinai Sabbath law, but because they were making judgments that were based on their "attached laws" to the Sabbath law (See Rm 2:1-4).

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 an accusation against the disciples. The Pharisees accused Jesus and the disciples of doing the simple "work" 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 in order

to eat it, according to the religious leaders at the time, such “work” was “not lawful on the Sabbath.”

If one elevates the religious traditions and ceremonies of man that are not a part of the law, to be obeyed as the law of God, then he has added to the law of God.

So in the immediate context of the situation, Jesus reminded the religious leaders of the example of King 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 by doing that which was not lawful. On the contrary, as the future king of Israel, his life was to be preserved. The higher law that he survive released him from the law that only the priests could eat the showbread. It was the case that a higher law stood above a written lower law of God.

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 of law, **they have brought themselves into the bondage of law-keeping** (traditions).

Any religious tradition or ceremony that is not established on the authority of the word of God brings those who keep such into bondage.

9. “Inherent grace”:

It is also evident that some of the Jews of Jesus’ day thought that they were within an “inherited grace.” Because they were the chosen people of God, 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 the Jews were in a national covenant relationship with God was true (See Jr 31:31-34). However, their national covenant relationship with God did not assume that individuals were inherently covered by the grace of God. The fact that we must all stand individually before the judgment of God, assumes that we all must individually walk in response to the grace of God (See Jn 12:48; 2 Co 5:10).

Christians must be careful not to assume that “being a member of the church” inherently guarantees that one 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 that we believe identifies the church. We will then conclude that our adherence to such laws and traditions of the church guarantees that we are standing within the grace of God. But this cannot be true.

We must always remember that a church of people saves no one. On the contrary, the church is composed of those who have responded to the gospel of God’s grace (Mk 16:15,16). It is our individual response to the gospel, not our adherence to the catechisms of a church of people, that guarantees our salvation. The church as people cannot save themselves apart from the grace of God, lest a group of people add all sorts of catechism that would define “the church,” and thus guarantee salvation by one’s “membership” with a particular church.

It is grace that saves, not church, though no one is saved outside the church, for the church is God’s assembly of the saved on earth.

It is from systems of religion that 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. This is the challenge of most religious people today who are stuck in the bondage of their own systems of meritorious churchianity, feeling that they are never good enough for God. The fact is that none of us is “good,” for outside grace there is not one good person according to law-keeping who has ever lived on this planet. ***“There is no one that does good, no, not one”*** (Rm 3:12).

10. Grace deliverance:

For Christians who are under grace, Paul made a reassuring statement in Romans 6:14: ***“For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.”*** 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 traditional religious precepts that we believe are necessary in order to be obedient subjects of King Jesus.

Grace delivers us from “perfect law-keeping salvation” 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 the Jews’ religion of meritorious law-keeping in order to live in a justified 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).

Contrary to the erroneous interpretation of some, the context of this statement **is not** about deliverance from personal sins

that are committed against law. Paul is referring to the sin of establishing “another gospel,” the very concept he introduced at the beginning of the Galatian document (See Gl 1:6-9). The “other gospel” was the theme of the entire document of *Galatians*. The truth of the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation and kingdom reign of Jesus sets us free from the self-deceptive religious behavior of saving ourselves through meritorious law-keeping and tradition-keeping, which is actually the “other gospel.” What sets us free is the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And once free, Paul affirms in Galatians 5:1, **stay free**.

At least two things are crystal clear in the Galatians 5:1 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. On the contrary, it simply means that we cannot self-righteously keep law perfectly in order to save ourselves.

We are in bondage if we think we can obey any system of law perfectly in order to save ourselves.

Paul’s second point in Galatians 5:1, 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** (See Gl 1:6-9). This is the “gospel of bondage,” and thus, another gospel.

Those who approach grace through law cannot understand what the Holy Spirit is saying in Galatians 5:1. They cannot understand because they have brought themselves into the bondage

of their own self-justifying performances of law and religious traditions in order to take pride in their own adherence to law. This performance-oriented religiosity is almost always revealed in the ceremonies of the assemblies of each particular religious group. In other words, some contend that unless certain prescribed assembly ceremonies on the first day of the week are strictly performed according to law or 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 any order in the ceremonies of the assembly.

When certain performances of our assemblies become traditional, then our traditional assembly is often exalted to law. It is then that the traditional assembly becomes “another gospel.”

A good example to which we must refer in this context is what Jesus said directly to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:24 in reference to the purpose of the Lord’s Supper, which statement Jesus had many years before said to all the apostles (See Lk 22:19). Paul recorded the purpose for which Jesus instituted the Supper. In reference to the Supper, Jesus stated to Paul the **purpose**, not the frequency, of the disciples’ observance of the Supper: **“This do in remembrance of Me”** (1 Co 11:24). We would certainly be correct to say that the phrase “this do,” assumes that Jesus’ disciples were under a mandate, a command, a law to observe the Supper. But the observance goes far beyond the simple obedience to a commandment.

The phrase **“of Me”** in Jesus’ statement, completely focuses our minds on why we partake of the Supper. Instead of performing a ceremonial law in order to justify ourselves in keeping law, Jesus was emphasizing our **direction of thought in partaking of the Supper**. Our thoughts were to be directed totally on Him, not on our performance of keeping a ceremony. Most people have forgotten this point. But the disciples in Troas

knew exactly what Paul meant when he recorded the statement. The Gentile disciples of Troas had been converted to Jesus out of the pagan idolotry of the Greeks and Romans. The Gentile idolaters of the time had invented all sorts of fictitious gods who would conform to the wishes of their inventers. So the disciples in Troas knew exactly what Jesus meant in the statement that Paul wrote to all Achaia.

(It is interesting to also note that the 1 Corinthians 11:24 statement is **not found** in the documents of *Matthew* and *Mark*, only in *Luke* and *1 Corinthians*. *Matthew* and *Mark* were books written to Jewish audiences, but *Luke* to a Gentile audience, to which also *1 Corinthians* was written. We can only imagine how difficult it was for the first Gentile Christians to get their minds off their former idolatrous gods and totally focus on King Jesus. The event of the Supper in their assemblies was specifically meant to aid them in this, and thus, when they ate and drank during the Supper they had to clear their minds of all their former idol gods and focus exclusively on Jesus.)

When the disciples in Troas partook of the Supper, therefore, **they focused on the incarnate Son of God**, not on obedience to some self-imposed ritual by which they would seek to justify themselves. In other words, **if we would partake of the Lord's Supper in order to self-justify ourselves through law-keeping, then we have missed the entire purpose for which Jesus instituted the Supper**. In fact, we have reverted back to "another gospel" because we have, during the Supper, turned our focus from "Me" (Jesus) to ourselves. And in doing so, we self-righteously think that we are now good for another week because we have obeyed a law.

If this point does not strike at the heart of self-righteous religionists, then they cannot understand why the disciples in Troas observed the Supper on a weekly basis (At 20:7).

Remembering the incarnate Son of God, in contrast to the pagan gods of idolatry in which they lived for centuries—the remnant thoughts of which were still in the minds of the early Gentile Christians—was the purpose and priority of the Gentile disciples in Troas. They needed to have this “memorial” **every first day of the week**. It was a memorial of Jesus, not the pagan gods of Zeus or Hermes they had been taught from childhood.

The early Gentile disciples did not want to forget the God who came into their flesh for their sins. Now contrast this thought with all those self-righteous religionists who partake of the Supper on the first day of the week in order to remember themselves, that they have perfectly kept a law in order to justify themselves. In reference to the Lord’s Supper, we have found that there are too many self-righteous religionists out there who cannot get their minds off themselves in reference to a legally ceremonialized Supper. They still have their minds on themselves in their perfect ceremonial observance of the Supper.

When self-righteous religionists do not observe the Lord’s Supper when they have available the bread and fruit of the vine to do so, then they have forgotten the purpose why Jesus instituted the Supper, or at least, degraded the Supper to an occasional legal ceremony.

11. Self-justifying assemblies:

During 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 laws and traditions of the assembly theatrical performances in order to stand justified before God. This is often 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 once one obeys the gospel.

It is appreciation for grace that generates inward worship. Lest we digress into a vain legal worship that is tailored after the performance of our own rituals, ceremonies, and desires, we are driven to the word of God in order to determine true worship that is pleasing to God (Jn 4:24; see Mk 7:1-9). And lest our worship is conducted in ignorance of God's word, we are again driven to the word of God in order to worship in knowledge of what God would accept in worship (See Cl 2:16-23). Therefore, the more we appreciate grace the more we are driven to our Father for His instructions on all matters of faith, including worship.

Grace that is fully appreciated inherently motivates the believer to seek out instructions from the Father in all matters of faith.

12. Trust in the grace of God:

In our self-reliance to stand on our own performances of law, we often forget that we stand righteous before God because of our faith in the gospel of grace that was revealed through Jesus Christ. It is thus His righteousness on which we rely, not our own (See Rm 10:1-3). Unfortunately, we have this urge to reassure our relationship with God on the foundation of our own meritorious righteousness. We seem to be driven by a feeling self-assurance, not by grace assurance.

There were those in the church of Rome who were of such thinking. Their misguided trust in themselves to perform law in a manner by which they would justify themselves, clouded their trust (faith) in the grace of God. Their view of grace through the legal performance of law was leading the church into bondage. So Paul concluded his arguments in *Romans* against such thinking by stating that we are justified by faith, not by our meritorious performance of works of law: “*And if by grace [we are saved],*” Paul argued, “***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 perfect performance of the statutes of law, then there would be no need for grace. We would put God in debt to save us on the merit of our own performances of law (See Rm 4:4). This was the fatal error of the legal-oriented Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day. Subsequently, the Pharisees and Sadducees 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 also 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 of their systems of law performance. They are still a gestapo of legal judges moving among the sheep. They behave as snakes who came out of Jerusalem in order to spy on John the Baptist (See Mt 3:7; Gl 2:4,5).

Inherent in grace is the principle that one cannot obey law perfectly in order to save oneself.

13. The place of law:

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 of *Romans*, 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 [perfect] 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 article “the” is not in the Greek 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-keeping that we might invent for ourselves, and thus seek to perfectly perform in order to justify ourselves.

Law inherently condemns; grace inherently sets one free.

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 question 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 in the grace of God. 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 in the grace of God causes us to respond to the law of God.

14. 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 perfect performance of His law.

This is the unfortunate theology to which Paul referred when he recalled 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, he wrote,

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness [grace] and seeking to establish their own righteousness [through the performance of 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 put away 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 perfect law-keeping or meritorious good deeds in order to supplement this grace.** In other words, because Christians have realized the sufficiency of 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 marginalize the cross by their supposed self-righteous performances. They do not, 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 performances. In reference to Christians, this should be a warning not to establish some system of legal-oriented churchianity by which we would seek to justify ourselves before God.

God's righteousness of grace was revealed at the cross. Therefore, if we seek to establish some system of salvation by which we would justify ourselves through our own meritorious law-keeping and good works, then we are marginalizing the cross.

15. 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 incarnate Son of God was the end of any and all attempts on our part to be justified before God solely on the basis of 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 the power that drives Christians into all the world to preach the gospel. 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).

Grace causes a response to law, and thus, meritorious obedience solely to law is made useless in reference to one saving himself.

One is baptized, therefore, not simply in obedience 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 good news is subsequently released in the heart of the one who was caused, by thanksgiving, to give his or her life in response to the heart of God that was revealed on the cross. It is for this reason that baptism should never be relegated to an act of simply obeying a com-

mand. Baptism must be a faith response of hope in the life of the one who understands the revelation of the heart of God that was revealed in the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God on the cross of Calvary.

We would not, therefore, through our own meritorious performance of law, marginalize 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).

It is the love of Christ that was revealed on the cross that compels one to be baptized.

16. Compelling grace:

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 the very strict performance-oriented religion of Judaism 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 would have been a greater 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 Pharisee who finally discovered the difference between grace and self-justification. We must recognize the same problem, lest we be drawn into a legal system of religiosity, and by doing such, marginalize the grace of God and the eternal effect of the cross. When we witness those

who would bring us into the bondage of their own self-imposed religious traditions of “another gospel,” we will stand up and proclaimed the same statement that the Holy Spirit wrote to the Christians in Rome: “***We are not under law, but under grace.***” Therefore, the Spirit continued to the Galatians,

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

(Galatians 5:1)

Group Review Discussion Questions

[After reading the text of this bookito, answer the following questions in a discussion group with others.]

- 1 - **A:** Why is it impossible for one to save himself on the basis of law-keeping alone?
- 2 - **A:** What does self-justification mean?
- 3 - **B:** Why did some of the early Jews in the first century find it difficult to understand grace?
- 4 - **B:** Why is it difficult for people to separate the law of God from the religious traditions of men?
- 5 - **C:** What is the fundamental definition of a religion?
- 6 - **C:** What happens when people exalt religious traditions to be parallel to or above the law of God?
- 7 - **D:** If we are justified by grace, then are the members of the church justified before they show up on on Sunday morning?
- 8 - **D:** Why is the teaching that salvation is by perfect law-keeping the source of much guilt?
- 9 - **E:** How or why does the law of God drive honest people to the grace of God?
- 10 - **E:** Why is the belief of antinomianism (faith only) a doctrine of bondage?
- 11 - **E:** Why is God’s law holy, just and good?
- 12 - **F:** As a child of God who has obeyed the gospel, why can the baptized Christian not work himself into the grace of God?
- 13 - **F:** Why are traditions and ceremonies wrong when they have been elevated to the authority of God’s law?
- 14 - **F:** Why did the nit-picking of the Pharisees in reference to what Jesus and the disciples did in picking the grain, bring them, the Pharisees, into bondage?
- 15 - **G:** Why are we saved by grace as opposed to religious systems of perfect law-keeping?
- 16 - **F:** Why did Paul write that no one is “good”?
- 17 - **G:** Why could the prodigal son not work himself back into being an heir?
- 18 - **H:** How can law bring us into bondage?
- 19 - **H:** What was the foundation upon which the Pharisees and Sadducees nit-picked what Jesus and His disciples did in walking through some fields of grain?
- 20 - **H:** Why must law always be viewed through grace?
- 21 - **H:** How can an assembly of Christians become the opportunity for brethren to nit-pick one another’s performance on Sunday morning?

- 22 - I:** From what does grace set us free?
23 - I: How does faith establish law?
24 - I: How can our assemblies become “another gospel”?
25 - I: Why must the gospel always be the standard of our salvation?
26 - K: How does establishing our own righteousness marginalize the cross of Jesus?
27 - L: Why is a response to grace profitable, while obedience solely to law often ends up being meritorious, and thus, self-righteous?
28 - M: Why does grace compel one to be obedient to God’s laws?
29 - N: How did the revelation of the righteousness of God at the cross put away the self-righteousness of man?
30 - O: How does grace cause thanksgiving?

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**, Philippians - **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**

Freedom Of Grace Versus The Bondage Of Law

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