

Rod Parsley Warns Against These Extremes

The law of God is holy, pure and reveals God and much of His will. The ceremonial part of that law anticipated Jesus, His sacrifice and His high priestly ministry at the right hand of God. While the ceremonial law is fulfilled, the civil or moral law continues to give us revelation of God's will. We know not to murder, steal and mistreat strangers—along with a thousand other precepts—because we have a revelation of God's will through His precious law.

But we are not saved by obedience to this law. We are saved by the great sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and by our faith in that sacrifice. The law remains in our lives as a revelation of God's will, though, as a guide to what pleases God and to what is best for our lives in this world.

This is where law and grace converge. Some want complete freedom to indulge themselves, and they call it grace. Others want binding precepts for every situation, and they want them ironclad. Most believers are arrayed somewhere between these two. Yet once we understand that we are intended for conformity to the image of Jesus, all extremes, all excuses, all schemes to indulge ourselves in the name of faith and all clinging to the laws of men dissolve in the simple truth that both law and grace serve the purpose of making us into the image of Jesus Christ.

In short, extremes of law and grace fail to reach the heart of the matter, which is the heart of God transplanted into us.

Delight in the Law

In the Old Covenant, God gave the law, and people were required to obey it. The focus seemed to be on externals, on the doing and the observing. Yet in the New Covenant, the

emphasis shifts to the heart. This doesn't diminish the absolutes of God in any way, but it does make the source of the obedience to God's will a matter of heart rather than a matter of external duties alone.

God wants a people who have absorbed His law into their inner being. He wants a people who embody the law and don't just observe it as a matter of obligation. The law of God lives in them, delights them, comprises their meditation and makes them into a people given to God.

In fact, one of the things that so moves me about Jeremiah 31:31-34 is how in one sentence God says He will "put My law within them and write it in their hearts" (v. 33b) and in the very next sentence, He says that "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (v. 33c). There is an unmistakable emphasis on heart and relationship here. God is clearly saying that the people of the New Covenant will be a people whose hearts and minds are filled with the revelation of God through His law, and that this will be part of a living relationship with Him.

How beautifully this expresses what God desires from His New Testament, New Covenant people. He doesn't want a lawless people. He also doesn't want a people of law apart from relationship. What He wants is a people who love His law—the revelation of God through His statutes and precepts—and live in a dynamic relationship with Him.

Once we glimpse this vision of God's law in our hearts, we can begin to understand the glory of Psalm 119. This is the longest psalm in the entire book of Psalms, and it is completely devoted to delighting in the law of the Lord. It would be easy for a Christian to look upon this and think it is just an Old Testament sentiment for an Old Testament people who haven't been touched by grace. But that's not what we should conclude once we've read the words from Jeremiah I've cited above. Once we have this "law and relationship" vision

in our hearts, we can enter into the psalmist's delight in the law of the Lord.

This psalmist has found what a New Covenant believer is supposed to find in the law of God. He has discovered that the law is a revelation of the God whom he loves. He has found that there is power and life in the law of God. The psalmist meditates upon the law and celebrates the law. He loves the law, because it reveals God. It shows the way of God. The law of the Lord has become his delight. This was as close as he could come to the kind of intimate, personal relationship a New Covenant believer has with God.

Follow the Spirit

Yet this matter of walking close to God's heart requires something additional. It requires that we open our lives to the Spirit of God. The Spirit is sent to live in us to remake us according to the will of God.

God does not give us His Spirit to free us from moral absolutes. He gives us His Spirit so we are transformed to the point that we can fulfill His moral absolutes. We yearn to do His will. This is what those who advocate for a "hyper-grace," liberty-at-all-costs perspective misunderstand. We are saved and filled with the Spirit so that we will be transformed into God's image. As that process unfolds, we are passionate to please the Father and to do His will. This means we delight in the law and decrees of God. We aren't saved and filled with the Spirit to pursue our own interests, our own passions or our own pleasures.

This is how great the salvation of God is for those who believe. They are empowered so they can do the will of God. Once they were under the law and fell short. Now they are under a law of faith by which they receive all that Jesus has provided by His obedience and sacrifice. It means that the saved now are filled with the power to do the will of God, to

please Him and live for His glory. This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What drains this good news of its power is when some believe salvation is an escape from God's standard and boundaries. It's a lie. Salvation is instead a rescue from sin and a remaking of our lives so we can fulfill God's standards and live within His boundaries.

In other words, salvation allows us to fulfill the grace-tempered law of God. The curse of the law was not that the law was a curse. That's how many Christians speak of the law today. No, the curse of the law was that there was no grace to keep it. The law became a curse to the people of God because they constantly fell short of it, which meant it was nothing but condemnation to them.

We needed the law to show us God and His will. Yet with the Spirit, we don't need that external reinforcement, because the Spirit puts the law inside us. Think of it as something like wet concrete. The law is the wooden form that holds the wet concrete in place. Yet once the concrete "matures," once it firms up and holds its shape on its own, the wooden forms aren't needed anymore.

As believers, we fulfill the law, but not because it constantly binds us like those wooden forms around wet concrete. Instead, we fulfill the law because we have absorbed the Spirit and the Word of God. The law has become part of us, as though it is in our DNA, and so we seek to do the will of God because of the transformation that has happened to our hearts.

Much of the law and grace debate in our time is simply a debate over what the gospel is. Do we believe "the faith which was once delivered to the saints," or do we embrace trendy, watered-down, motivational talk? Do we preach a costly gospel that calls for repentance and a life of surrender, or do we

commit to the materialistic, self-centered pabulum of most churches today? Do we build upon the Bible, or do we build upon the shifting sands of modern culture?

I'm for the gospel of Jesus—the hard-core, unvarnished gospel of the risen Christ. And because I am for that gospel and no other, I do not believe the gospel abolishes the moral law of God. I believe the gospel proclaims a Jesus who fulfilled the law and who now empowers us to live for the glory of God. I believe in truths passed through the cross, tempered by grace, covered in mercy and still confronting the believer with works ordained by God. I do not believe in a salvation earned by works. I do believe in a salvation that calls for appropriate action as an offering to a loving God.

When we return to that gospel, we will find the message of hyper-grace fleeing before a message of costly grace and a people full of godly passion and eager to please their Lord. That's where you'll find me.

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