

'Hyper-Grace' Message Creating Culture of Lawlessness

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I had just finished praying in the altars on the last night of an extended revival. A young man who was studying for ministry approached me with tears in his eyes. As I placed my hand on his shoulder, he said, "I need to apologize to you. I judged you too soon. Anytime I hear someone preach what sounds like 'law' it makes me angry and I instantly shut them out. I can see now I was wrong and missed out on

what God could have done in me this week." My heart welled up with compassion for him, as my mind replayed the past week searching for the offense. I took a few extra minutes to minister and pray with him there at the altar and the next few days thinking about our conversation.

To be clear, I am a preacher of the gospel, not the law. As an evangelist, I have no other message than that of Christ and Him crucified. It is a message not only of grace, but of love, forgiveness, salvation, redemption, faith, freedom and power!

That said, I have noticed that anytime I make reference to the law, sin, conviction and repentance alongside grace, I feel barriers go up in the atmosphere. At that moment it often becomes necessary to stop and define these terms as they have become so distorted by the toxic theology that has been taught in recent years.

Focusing solely on the grace of God without preaching the divine law, justice and judgment of God is unbalanced. Remember, John 3:16 doesn't just tell us that God loved us and gave his son to us, it also tells us we will perish unless we believe upon Jesus.

It seems to me that we have created a culture in which God's law isn't just physically taken down from courthouses across the nation, but spiritually it has been removed from churches as well. What a shame!

David wrote, "I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times" (Ps. 119:19-20). Today if you take delight in God's law you are certainly regarded as a stranger here on Earth. Messages of lawlessness, disguised as grace, abound within the body of Christ in these last days to the point that any discussion of God's law is immediately deemed as old-fashioned, legalistic and anti-grace.

As the message of grace has become the vogue message in today's church culture, have we become unbalanced? Does the law have a place in our preaching alongside grace? Is it possible to once again take delight in the law of God? Bear with me as I ask a few of these important questions. Let the Holy Spirit speak, and may He bring the light of truth.

Is God's Law Still Relevant for Today?

Yes! The law was not a set of random rules that God made up to restrict his people as they gathered around the foot of the mountain. It was an expression of his divine nature. His way of showing former slaves what a life of righteousness looked like. They were not given to restrict his people from freedom, but to release them into it! As James states, "whoever looks intently into the perfect law that

gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do" (James 1:25).

I wonder which one of God's laws is no longer relevant today in the 21st century with our new revelation? If we are under grace, why hold people accountable for lying to you? Why not invite your neighbor over to sleep with your spouse? Why prosecute a murderer? Why pay for anything at Walmart when you can just take it?

Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). Jesus then revealed what that law—fulfilled in himself and within us—looked like.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be subject to judgment. ...You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:21-28).

Where is the higher standard? With Moses when adultery was done with the body or with Jesus when adultery was done with the heart? Jesus was able to teach the law this way, because with Moses the law was external to the man, written upon stone, but under grace the law was internal to the man written upon his heart (Rom. 2:15, Heb. 10:16, 2 Cor. 3:3). Under the law, man was told what he had to do to live righteously, but under grace, man was enabled to actually be righteous.

Is It Possible to Take Delight in God's Law and Still Be Under Grace?

David said, "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands" (Ps. 112:1). I am a man who stays in awe of God's love and grace. I also take great delight in all of his word—including the law. I have found that grace doesn't render the law irrelevant to me but actually makes it even more relevant for me.

Under the law, man was provided the PRECEPT—that is, the divine rule that taught godly behavior. Every precept of God is based upon a PRINCIPLE—that is, the divine reason behind the rule. Under grace we come to fully understand the principles that drove the precept. Paul was right when he said, "the law was our tutor" (Gal. 3:24).

The Pharisees found satisfaction in their strict adherence to all 613 precepts. Outwardly they looked incredibly religious. Jesus said they were whitewashed tombs, filled with dead men's bones. They knew the precepts but couldn't grasp the principles. Jesus was the perfect picture of not just the precepts but the principles as well. He taught that all the law was based on love. Love for God and love for others. Without love, you'd never understand the law, let alone uphold it (Matt. 22:40, Gal. 5:14).

The Pharisees would criticize Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath. To them this was work, which dishonored the precept. Their understanding of the law would rather leave a man sick, lame or dead than to see him made whole on a holy day. How absurd! That's exactly what religion is—absurd! Jesus told them that they didn't understand the principle. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

When we see the principles behind the precepts, we begin to see God's truth, which leads to wisdom. These truths can then be applied to every aspect of life. God's wisdom always produces the greatest blessings. The more I understand and utilize the truth of God, the more I am blessed.

So like David, "I meditate on your law all day long. Your commands make me wiser" (Ps. 119:97).

Should the Law Still Be Preached Today?

Paul said, "I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law" (Rom. 7:7).

The law has a purpose. It reveals God's perfect nature and at the same time it reveals our imperfect nature. The law is a picture that shows God's perfection as well as a mirror that shows our imperfection. It's just as much a work of grace to show the sinner his sin, as it is grace to show the sinner the way out of his sin.

Today the lawless preacher says, "don't preach the law, only grace! It's the kindness of God that will lead them to repentance." My friend, grace does not withhold the truth! Jesus came in grace and preached the truth. Likewise, if I truly love you I must point to the problem, then offer the solution.

The law is not bad, "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). Oh for the day that preachers would once again realize that God's law is good! Oh for the day that ministers would no longer withhold truth for the fear of man, but with a burning fire begin to proclaim truth with the fear of God!

The law is not the problem, sin is! Today man tries to erase sin by deleting the law and then calling that grace. However, Jesus said, "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void (Luke 16:17). The law points to the sin, "in order that sin might be recognized as sin" (Rom. 7:13).

Once the problem is fully identified, then and only then will man cry out, "What a wretched man I am!" (Rom. 7:24). How will a man ever find his Savior, unless he realizes he is in need of saving? Today sinners find it easy to sit in comfort within our churches never once feeling convicted for their sins. Is it grace to let a drowning man drown lest we offend him? Is it love to watch him sink below the surface hoping one day he might stumble upon the answer?

Grace never withholds the truth! It goes to the furthest extent to rescue us from our sin. Nor does it leave us as it finds us. It transforms us, enabling us to become everything Jesus intended us to be.

Jesus said in the last days "lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12). The unbalanced message of distorted grace is creating a culture of lawlessness within the body of Christ. As the curtain continues to close and the time of His return draws near, we must right this tilting ship by continuing to preach grace and once again taking delight in his law!

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