

"This grace wherein we stand."

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When God gave His holy law through Moses at Sinai, Israel could not stand before Him. Moses himself said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Many centuries after, the Apostle Paul found it brought him under the death sentence for he said, "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom. 7: 9). In contrast to this he wrote of, "This grace wherein we stand" (Rom. 5: 2). On a legal basis no one ever **stands** before God: all **collapse** and **fall down**.

So we all rejoice in Paul's emphatic statement, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6: 14), and it is helpful to observe 'that though the Apostle Peter was not led to expound the matter as Paul did, yet he corroborated this fact in an inferential way. This **we see** if we compare 1 Peter 2: 9, with Exodus 19: 5, 6. We notice a strong similarity, for the "royal priesthood," the "holy nation," the peculiar people, of Peter, occur in the Exodus passage, in slightly different words.

But on the other hand there is a profound difference. In Exodus God started with an "IF." "If ye will obey My voice indeed;" but they never did obey His voice and so never were what was proposed. In Peter the "If" is absent and instead we read, "But ye **are** a chosen generation." The Christians to whom Peter wrote **were** these very things that Israelites as a nation were **not**. What was never reached on a legal basis was reached on the basis of grace. And how? His first chapter shows us how they were "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," "redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ;" "born again . . . by the word of God," and that through the operation of the Spirit of God. This was, "the true grace of God" in which they stood, as Peter told them in his last chapter.

So here is a very striking contrast between law and grace. The nation to whom the law was given were not a **chosen** generation but rather, as Moses had to admit, "a **perverse** and **crooked** generation," and again, "a very **forward** generation, children in whom is no faith" (Deut 32: 5 and 20). The law was given as a test and it manifested the evil that was in them. It could not give the life that was needed, as we learn in Galatians. Grace does give the life, and then calls upon us to live out the life in a way that will be pleasing to God and glorify Him.

Standing in grace, we are brought into liberty, and in that liberty we are to "stand fast," and not be "entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5: 1). But let us take care that we do not turn that liberty into license. In a letter recently to hand there was reference to some who were saying, "I am a Christian, therefore I am under no law, and can do what I like," and they proceed to do things which did not honour their Lord nor bring credit to their faith. That statement is not correct.

It is true we are not under the law of Moses; neither as the means of our justification nor as the rule of our lives, but it is not true that we are under no law at all, for here are two scriptures that plainly refute that idea. In both the Apostle Paul tells us what governed his own life. He wrote that he was, "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9: 21) and again, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8: 2). This illustrates what he wrote in Romans 7: 4. The Christian is now united to the risen Christ by the Holy Spirit, and the law, or control, thus established is of a far higher order than anything established by the law of Moses.

So in many New Testament scriptures, and specially in the writings of the Apostle John, we get the commandments of our Lord plainly stated. They are not given in order that by keeping them we

may establish a standing for ourselves in righteousness before God. We have that righteous standing as the result of the work of Christ on our behalf, and the commands reach us to give us clear direction as to His will for us. The way we obey them — or disobey — does not determine our spiritual standing before God, but it does determine the state of our spiritual health and our spiritual power.

Most of us have known what it is to have had at some time a season of spiritual lethargy or distress or despondency. Should we not on such an occasion ask ourselves, Have I been flying in the face of some commandment of my Lord? Matters arise and questions confront us as to which we cannot find in the Scriptures any clear command of our Lord, and it then becomes a matter of spiritual exercise, of searching the Scriptures that we may be able to deduce and discern what His mind for us may be. But on the other hand as to many things we do have clear commands, which are simply to be obeyed, since we are "under law to Christ." To disobey them is to court spiritual trouble and even spiritual disaster.

We are indeed delivered from the law, as the Apostle has told us, but this is because we are "married to Another," who rules us, not by force or by penalty, but by love, and the true heart finds its peace and its joy in being happily subject to Him.

There is a remarkable incident recorded about C. T. Studd of missionary fame. In his early years, after he had left Cambridge University and before he went out to China, his host in Leicester was attracted by a light under his bedroom door at an abnormally early morning hour. Knocking and enquiring, he found him poring over his Bible. In answer, he said, "Oh, I have been reading that the Lord said, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments.' Now I do love Him, and I am trying to search out all His commandments to see if I am keeping them." Most of us have heard of the extraordinary life of devotion which he pursued as the result.

Well it would be if the younger Christians of this our day faced up to the commandments of the Lord in the spirit in which he did it. Well also it would be if we older Christians did likewise.