

Law and Grace

Ex. 34; 2 Cor. 3.

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It is important to see that there were two distinct occasions in which we find tables of stone, according to God's command, committed, though in a different way, to man. On the first occasion, as we know, there was total ruin; and when God uttered His commands then, afterwards written down, there was no shining of the face whatever; there was no Moses transfigured by the power of glory. Law, pure and simple, never made the face of man to shine; it is not the intention of law; nor is it the result of law. Law, simply as such, is characterized by darkness and tempest, by thunder and lightning, by the voice of God dealing with the guilty — more tremendous than all together. And so it was on the first occasion when the law was announced by God Himself, and the tables were broken (before ever they reached man) by the indignant law-giver.

On the second occasion what a difference! The lawgiver was called into the presence of God, who thereon was pleased to give a mingling of mercy along with law. There was a covenant expressly made of this combined composite character. It was not law alone, and not grace alone, but rather the mingling of grace along with law. For it would have been perfectly impossible for God to have carried on dealings with Israel, or to have brought them even into the land, unless there had been this mingling of grace and mercy with law. Consequently on this occasion the law was still committed to man; but it was shut up in the ark, not displayed with all its terrors before the eyes of men; it was enclosed, as we know, in the testimony.

Now, there are many even of God's children who think that such is exactly the tenor of the dealings of God with us now; that is, law and grace mingled — grace hindering the action of law; the law bringing us in guilty, but grace interposing to screen the guilty according to the words we read in the early part of Ex. 34. There Jehovah proclaims Himself in the character of lawgiver, though he declares His longsuffering and mercy, as it is said, "Jehovah, Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." But it is also added, "And that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Now you will observe that while such is the principle of God's dealings — that it is not law alone, nor grace alone, but the two together — while this is the case, whenever the mediator comes forward to speak to the people he has to put a veil upon his face. When he goes into the presence of God, the veil was taken off; in glory, in the presence of glory, there is no veil. But as long as man had to do with the law, even though there was mercy and grace mingled with it, the veil must be put on when he spoke with the people.

Now, the remarkable thing that I would call your attention to is this, that our position is in contrast with both. Our position is neither having to do with law alone, nor with law mingled with grace; we are in presence of grace and glory without the law at all. This is precisely what the apostle shows in 2 Cor. 3. Here he does not refer to the contrast of Ex. 19 or 20, but solely to the occasion of mingled law and grace in Ex. 34; and he lets us see that the ministration on that day was one of death and condemnation. The reason is this, that if the law enters at all, if I have to do with it as that which governs me, and under which I am, the more mercy that is shown, the more guilty am I, and He will by no means clear the guilty.

Now, that all-condemning character did not come out while God was dealing with men before Christ; but when Christ came, God stood to His principles with the utmost nicety and all His authority. The reason is, that there was One come who could solve all difficulties, meet all need, and deliver from all distress and danger. It was because the Son of God was now become the Son of man, and the Son of man was willing to suffer on the cross, not yet about to administer the glory.

Hence it is that our position is put in distinct and positive contrast. The apostle says, "If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." He does not put us in the place of the children of Israel, but takes care to show that it is after the type of Moses drawing near into the presence of God, where he takes off the veil. This is the sign of our position now, and not the children of Israel. In short it is not the man veiled, and the children of Israel afraid of him because of the glory of his countenance, which they could not look upon; but the man unveiled in the presence of God, when he turns, not to the people with a veil upon his face, but to God in glory without the veil.

Such is our position now; such the position of all Christians, if they only knew it. This comes out fully in the last verse. He says, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." "We all" is in contrast with the one man Moses. The position of the Christian is typified by Moses in the presence of God, and not by the children of Israel in the presence of Moses veiled. "We all," for God makes not the smallest difference in this respect; the weakest Christian has exactly the same position before God. Whenever it is a question of position, of the simple effect or result of what the Lord Jesus has accomplished and given to us by grace, there is no difference whatever. When it is a question of spiritual power, there is a difference, and all possible room for variety. Just as in the first Adam there is no difference in the general fact that all have sinned; yet, when you come to look at the extent to which people have gone in sin, there are degrees of difference.

Precisely so with the Second man, the last Adam. He has brought all who belong to Him now into this common place of blessing. We all with open, or *unveiled*, face (for this is the true force of it) beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord. This was what Moses saw, and only Moses, and he merely for a moment; whereas it is *our* constant position. A Christian, all the time he is here below, is, as far as the work of Christ is concerned, one entitled to draw near to God, to look up into the glory, and to be there himself; the veil gone, Christ without a veil. There was a veil but it is rent. Now there is none — none on the heart of the believer, none on the face of Christ or on ours; it is completely gone. "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

What the Holy Ghost now ministers to us is not merely a Saviour who came down into our woe and misery to bear our iniquities and sins, but that same Saviour after the work of grace is done when He is gone up as the witness of its perfectness into the presence of God; and we are invited by the Holy Ghost to keep our eye fixed upon Him there, glorified according to the excellency of redemption. That will not make His grace in coming down here to be less precious; nor will it make redemption to be less prized, but much more. It will also imprint a heavenly character upon all our ways; and this, and nothing less, is our place. "As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly"; and, "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." Then it will be perfect; now it is only partial, and according to the measure in which self is judged.

What hinders the practical effect, the heavenly power being reflected from us, is the unjudged activity of our nature. Do we not know it? When is it we do wrong? When is it we form mistaken judgments, and become careless and worldly? Just in proportion as our eye is off Christ as He is now in glory. I grant you that Christ anywhere before the soul is a preserving means. Nevertheless, there is no such power for overcoming the seductions of the world; and that which looks fair and religious in the world; nothing will do it thoroughly but Christ in glory. As far as leading out our souls in love and devotedness is concerned, Christ here below will do it. But Christ in glory puts out the light of earth's best religion, and makes it appear pale and tawdry by the side of its surpassing brightness. We are invited, we are called upon as Christians, to behold Him in that glory continually now. The Lord give us so to walk, and we shall find the fruit of it, "changed into the same image from glory to glory."

One word more. There is nothing so dangerous as to trifle with the truth; nothing more ruinous than for men to use the brightest truth, and to be careless about the matters of every-day life. I beseech of you to remember this. There is something even of a disgusting character about it when we fail in ordinary duties, and yet are at the same time talking about resurrection and glory — life and all the special blessedness of the Christian position. I beseech you, my brethren and sisters, especially those of you who are young (though indeed it is a snare for old as well as young), think seriously of this. It is the natural snare of those who are accustomed to an atmosphere of truth, where the words of God are, so to speak, a common household bread. None are in such danger; but it is a danger because the eye and heart are not on Jesus. There will be power where there is simplicity with self-judgment; nowhere else.

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