

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON LAW AND GRACE AND IT'S IMPLICATION TO THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

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Abstract

Jesus confronted the Pharisees over their legalistic lifestyle; not understanding the mind of God and concentrating on the less important things instead of the important matters of the law. Paul also showed disapproval of the obsessive legalism in his letters to the Galatians and Roman Churches. This paper examined the concepts of law and grace in the letters of Paul, through a comparative study, analyzes the relevance of Law and Grace in Paul's concept to the contemporary Christianity. The Law as a terminology is derived from the Hebrew word "Torah" which connotes God's legislative code, the commandments of God and his instructions. The Law is good, righteous and holy but man found it difficult to keep. The Jews and the early Church found the law burdensome. Grace is unmerited favour given to an inferior by a superior. No one could attain righteousness by observance of the Law. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Church is no longer under the law but under grace. Righteous living can only be possible through grace. The gospel of Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures and laws. This work discovered that grace is a necessity in the life of every believer. No matter one's qualifications, without grace no one can please God.

Keywords: Law, grace, legalism, Church, righteousness

Introduction

The Church today is suffering from dominance of heretical teachings. Many of the so called Pastors exhibit charisma without being grounded in the word and sound doctrine. It is factual that many professing ministers are not really called by God but entered the ministry as a result of bad economy and greed. Hence, they do not pass through training and receive sound teaching which they can pass on to others. These result to variant

teachings. Others out of zeal interpret the Scriptures to suit their inordinate affections, materialism, belief system and worldviews. The extreme fanaticisms and traditions which gave Paul concern are not absent in our Churches today.

It is evident that present day Christians are unstable in their faith as a result of being tossed about by every wind of doctrine which restrict Christians from having right understanding of their position in Christ. At several points, Jesus confronted the Pharisees who claim to be the custodian of the law over orthodoxy and legalism. By grace are we saved and not of the law. Paul showed disapproval of the obsessive legalism in his letters to the Galatian and Roman Churches. He showed the disparities between Judaism and Christianity. Denominationalism has succeeded in making Christianity a complex faith which is as a result of proliferation of Churches with different doctrines. This paper examined the concepts of law and grace. Through a comparative study, analyzes the relevance of Law and Grace in Paul's concept to the contemporary Christianity. Some scholars have tried to demonstrate that Judaism was not a religion that predicated salvation on the performance of good works. According to Sanders,

In Palestinian Judaism, the notions of “grace” and “works” are not opposed to each other in any way. I believe that it is safe to say that the notion that God's grace is in any way contradictory to human endeavor is totally foreign to Palestinian Judaism. The reason for this is that grace and works were not considered alternative roads to salvation. Salvation is always by the grace of God, embodied in the covenant.¹

Paul expressed his dissatisfaction with the Galatian Christians who thought they could work out their salvation through the Law. In Galatian 3:1-3, Paul says “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly betrayed and crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you : did you receive the Spirit by observing the Law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

Christians receive salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus which the grace of God makes possible. Titus 2:11 says the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Nobody can get saved through works of the Law or ceremonial observances.

¹E.P. Sanders, “Jesus, Paul and Judaism” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Vol. II, 25, 1*, Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, eds. (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982) 394.

The Concept of the Law

Law is generally understood as a rule guiding a particular people which must be obeyed. There is variety of terms in the Old Testament for Law. They are *torah*, law, instruction, teaching; *hoq*, 'statute, decree', *mispat*, 'judgment, legal decision'; *dabar*, 'word'; *miswah*, 'command (ment)'. The first five books are called *torah*, 'Law' by Jews and the New Testament, even though they appear to be as much about history as law.² The *law* is, primarily, the Mosaic covenant.³ The Ten Commandments or Ten words (Decalogue) in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21 are rightly regarded as the epitome of Old Testament Law.

The term law (*nomos*) in the New Testament occurs over seventy times in the Romans but not always in the same sense. Most often it means the law of God in one form or another⁴. *Nomos* in the New Testament refers to the law of Moses but occasionally refers to the Old Testament as Scripture and yet does not denote the Pentateuch, for Paul cites passages from Psalms, Proverbs and Isaiah and labels them as 'Law' (Rom. 3:10-19; 1 Cor. 14:21)⁵

'Works of Law' (*erga nomou*) which occurs eighty times in Paul (Gal 2:16) [three times]; Gal. 3:2, 5,10; Rom. 3:20,28) has also been the subject of controversy. Why is the phrase "works of the Law" ruled out as a means of Justification by Paul? Fuller⁶ suggests that the term is shorthand for legalism. Whenever the concept of law is mentioned some scholars see it from a negative angle. One should ask: is this referring to the law as God gave it in history and intended it to function or to the way humans have rightly or wrongly responded to God's law. Dunn in the same vein defines "works of the law" as denoting all that the law requires of the devout Jew.⁷ According to Thelma⁸, the best explanation for Paul's rejection of 'erga nomou' in Galatians 2:16 as a path to justification is that people do not perform necessary works. The problem with this is human failure to do the works required by the law. Paul sees all who are of the works of the law as those under curse.

Romans 6:14, Paul says "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." This means that by practicing the law, you are not free from sin

² *New Bible Dictionary 3rd ed.*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 672.

³ John G. Reisinger, *But I Say Unto You* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant, 2006), 204-210, Kindle.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 50.

⁵ *New Bible Dictionary*, 675.

⁶ D.P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast and or Continuum?* Pasadena, California: Fuller Seminary Press, 1990.

⁷ J.D.G. Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Gal. 3:10-14)", *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster: John Knox Press, 1990), 223-238.

⁸ F. Thelma, *From Plight to Solution, A Jewish Framework for Understanding of the Law in Galatians and Romans* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989).

until you come under grace. The phrase “under law” is a life before conversion and after conversion as life “under grace.” Under law means under condemnation for breaking the law, or for relating to God’s law solely in a way considered legalistic. The new covenant life is dead to sin and alive to God. In Acts 20: 24, the gospel is regarded as the “gospel of the grace of God” (NKJV). The gospel of grace is revealed progressively in God’s covenant throughout the Old Testament era and in its fullest expression when Jesus came in history.

The Concept of Grace

Grace is a term commonly used in the Christian world today. When people get favour they feel they do not deserve, it is called grace. Grace is seen as getting results effortlessly. It is undeserved acceptance and love received from another. “It is underserved favour granted by a superior to an inferior.”⁹ Scholars have come up with different definitions of the term grace based on biblical perspectives. Grace is always considered of being in contrast with the Law from Paul’s perspective.

The Frailty of the Law

Paul is strongly against legalism in his writings. He opposed Jewish legalism which taught one merit right standing before God by doing the works of the Law. Sanders¹⁰ is of the opinion that scholars interpret Paul and second Temple Judaism through the lenses of the Reformation struggle between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism instead of from a historical perspective. To him, the idea that Judaism was legalistic is a serious misreading of evidence. “The problem with the Jews is that they did not pursue the law with faith ‘but as from works’ (Rom. 9:32). Instead of submitting themselves to God’s saving righteousness, they tried to establish their own righteousness by works. Paul’s critique of the Jews was not from an outsider’s perspective, for he had suffered from the same tendency. He attempted to obtain right standing with God on the basis of ‘his own righteousness from the law’ instead of the righteousness of God on the basis of faith.”¹¹

The gospel of Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. The coming of Christ has overtaken circumcision, food laws and observance of days. These rites are no longer required because the days of separation between Jews and Gentiles are not valid anymore.

⁹ Charles W. Draper in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville Tennessee: Holman Publishers, 2003), 678

¹⁰E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1977).

¹¹*The New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 676.

Those men from Judea who had gone to Antioch, and then to Corinth, and to Galatia, to bring Gentile believers back under the law of Moses were called *troublemakers*, not only by Paul, but Peter also, and the great leaders in the Jerusalem council. They wrote letters to the churches: "...The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment"(Acts 15:23-24). The great truth that must be learnt from this text is that legalism causes division in the Church.

To both Peter and Paul these legalizers were troublemakers. Their motives may have been good but they ignored the further revelation committed unto Paul. This had caused nothing but trouble, and it is the same today. Those who mix law with grace, or the commission to the twelve with that later given to Paul, cause trouble and division. Those who teach the gospel of the Sermon on the Mount, which was in order for the Jews then, instead of the gospel of the grace of God, which we are to preach today, cause trouble and division.¹²

Law and Grace in Romans

Paul argues in Romans that a person is justified not by works of the law, but by faith in Christ. In Romans 3:31 Paul asks, "Do we then make void the law through faith?" By saying that salvation is by grace through faith alone, do we make the law void? Paul's immediate response is "*God forbid: Yea, we establish the law.*" The law was not given to help us to be good, but to show us that we are *not* good and need a Savior. The IVP's Dictionary opinion: "The fundamental argument against the Jews in Romans 2 is not that they are legalistic nor that they exclude Gentiles. Rather, they are criticized for failing to observe the law which treasure and teach. Thus, when Paul concludes his case in Rom. 3:20 by saying that no one is right before God by works of law, it follows from the preceding argument that the law as a whole, is contemplated and that human beings failed to keep it perfectly."¹³

Paul argues that humanity despite its knowledge of God, "did not honour him as God or give thanks to him...(Rom. 1:21). In Romans 2:25-29, Paul annuls the idea that circumcision gives the Jew a privilege over others before God. Paul praises the "uncircumcised" who abide by the dictates of the law over the "circumcised" who do not

¹² Cornelius R. Stam, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Stevens Point, Wisconsin, USA: Worzalla Publishing co, 1998)38

¹³ New Bible Dictionary, 3rd ed.. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 676.

adhere to the law. The Jew assumes that his circumcision protects him from serious sin. Christians receive justification which makes them part of the Christian community and is made available as a gracious gift of God. In Romans 5:1-2, Paul declares that since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand. For Paul, the Christian faith consists of continual dependence on God who grants believers access to the sphere of grace which continually defines their existence (Romans 5:1).

Paul was more zealous of the traditions of his father than all the others. He knew the Old Testament!"For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and It was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). God counted Abraham's faith for righteousness although Abraham was not personally righteous. The record shows again and again that he was a sinner. He was a sinner just like us. But he believed God, and God counted *his faith* for righteousness, because God was going to provide everything necessary for the payment of sin. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace..." (Rom. 4:4). A reward does not come of grace but by works. A reward is earned. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth theungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). God says that there is nothing for you to do for salvation, as Christ did it all at Calvary.

By Grace Alone in 1 and 2 Corinthians

Grace speaks in the letters of Paul to the Corinthians. The concept of grace in 1 and 2 Corinthians depicts that believers are utterly dependent on God's grace. They do not escape the "god of this world" through their own devices.¹⁴ Paul's dependence on God's "grace" with reference to his call and the gift of his apostleship is set in bold relief by his confession in 1 Cor. 15:9, "I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God". The grace of God is what transformed Paul from a persecutor of the Church to a leader of the Church (1Cor. 15:10). God's grace was visibly at work in the life of Paul which helped him endure all trials and persecutions. In 1 Cor. 15:10, Paul says: "by the grace of God I am what I am..." Paul stressed that his life would have amounted to nothing without grace. Paul is a direct result of the grace of God upon his life. Grace is the power that sustains Paul in his ministry.

Christians are not to take the grace of God for granted. 2 Cor. 6:1 urges believers not to take the grace of God for granted. To receive the grace of God in vain is Paul's way of pointing to a Corinthian failure to allow God's grace to work itself out in their lives.

¹⁴ J.B. Eastman, *The Significance of Grace in the Letters of Paul*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1999), 48

Law and Grace in Galatians

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he addressed a group of Churches who were beguiled by legalism. Consequently, the apostle prescribes the spiritual antidote for this seductive teaching. In this epistle, Paul uses some of the strongest language found in his writings to defend the gospel of the grace of God. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth...." He marveled that they were "so soon removed from Him that called them into the grace of Christ unto another gospel. These Galatian believers had begun well. They had been saved by grace through faith and were rejoicing therein, that is, until the Judaizers arrived on the scene. They taught the Galatians, "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved." Thus the battle lines were drawn as confusion quickly swept through these assemblies. The apostle Paul tried to destroy the false notion that they could be justified by the works of the law. Hence, he boldly declares: "whosoever of you is justified by the law has fallen from grace." But what does it mean to "fall from grace?" It is an idiom referring to loss of status, respect, or prestige. In this case, Paul meant to backslide, thereby losing the favour of God.

In Galatians 1:6-7, Paul says that the Galatian believers had failed to ask this question. They had been lured from the wonderful gospel of the grace of God to "another gospel" which had also been true, but which belonged to a former dispensation. It was still valid among the people to whom it had first been preached - the Jewish nation - but some zealous Jews were now perverting the good news about Christ for the Gentiles. Paul is trying to make the Galatian Christians to understand the encompassing grace of God that saves all who come to God, not only the Jews anymore and not by good deeds alone but by the grace of God. Paul was deeply concerned of the danger of confusing the blessed message of the grace of God with the messages and programs that belong to former ages. Believers in Paul's days lightly esteemed the infinite grace of God. Indeed, it was during the apostle's own ministry that he had to write to the Galatians: "I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel" (Gal. 1:6).

Stam¹⁵ opines:

Those who say that the Judaizers came to the Galatians with a spurious gospel are wrong. The trouble was not apostasy, which means rejection of truth formerly embraced, for these Judaizers knew and believed the Scripture and used it for their argument. Their problem was that they failed to recognize the further *revelation* committed to Paul by the glorified Lord. This was a dispensational

¹⁵ Cornelius R. Stam, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Stevens Point, Wisconsin, USA: Worzalla Publishing co, 1998), 34

error, for they sought to bring the Galatian believers who were saved under the dispensation of the grace of God back under the dispensation of the law.

The Galatian believers had lost the blessing of God. When Paul was first with them he was sick with a disease that evidently affected his eyes. "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first" (Gal. 4:13). He was detained there because he was ill, and still he preached. This is how deep he loves his ministry. "And my temptation which was in my flesh you despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (Gal. 4:14-15).

These Galatians had been so enthusiastic to hear Paul that they would have gladly given him their own eyes! But all that had changed. They were cursed with fighting and bickering until Paul had to say, "Take heed that you be not [devoured] one of another" (5:15). Stam asks: why this sad change? Had they denied the Scriptures? No, the legalists had come to them with Scriptures from the Old Testament. They had done what most of the professing churches are doing today. They took rites and ceremonies and forms and decrees from a former dispensation and added them *to*, and mixed them *with*, God's pure message of grace. Paul said by divine inspiration, "Beloved, do not tamper with grace or you will reap a curse."¹⁶

Paul, the chief of sinners, saved by grace, had been sent by God to tell the Gentiles that they could now be saved by grace alone because Christ died for their sins. Some of the Jewish believers in Judea who were still zealous of the law became concerned about this. They recognized this as something different than they had known. When Christ was on earth, He was under the law; He went to the synagogue every Sabbath Day; He was circumcised the eighth day, He kept the feast days. So those believers in Judea became concerned about the Gentiles becoming the children of God and not keeping the law. They did not see how anyone could be saved by grace through faith alone. They went to Galatia and sought to bring the Galatian believers back under the law. Galatians 1:6-7, Paul says "I marvel that ye are so soon removed..." There was no contradiction between law and grace, only a further development of truth, a further revelation of truth. "...but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel [good news] of Christ."

Paul called these legalizers intruders and troublemakers, and the leaders at Jerusalem agreed with him. You see, the Galatian letter was written after the great council at

¹⁶ Cornelius R. Stam, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Stevens Point, Wisconsin, USA: Worzalla Publishing co, 1998), 43.

Jerusalem where Paul and Peter; John, James, and the rest met to thrash out the problem. As Acts 15 tells us, certain men had come from Judea to Antioch and told the Gentile believers that submission to circumcision was the law and that the law was necessary to salvation. The record tells us that Paul and Barnabas had "no small dissension" and "disputation" with them. Paul and some of his co-workers went to Jerusalem to talk to the leaders there about this matter (Gal. 2:2), "But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter..." (Gal. 2:7). The gospel of the circumcision was the good news that through Israel all nations could be blessed if they would simply accept Messiah as King. But they did not receive Him. Consequently, God raised up the Apostle Paul and sent him forth with the gospel of the *uncircumcision*, that now, poor Gentile sinners who had no promises, no covenants, no God, no Christ, and no hope, could find salvation offered by grace through faith on the basis of the finished work of Christ at Calvary. They could not tell Paul anything about the Scriptures that he did not already know.

In Galatians 6:8, Paul opines that living according to the flesh is connected with death. Those who live according to the Spirit will gain "eternal life." Living in sin is flesh while living in righteousness is considered as living in the Spirit.

By Grace Alone in Ephesians

It is an interesting fact that grace is what makes the difference in the life of every Christian. God wants you to know the riches of His grace. He wants you to be saved simply by grace and nothing more - no rituals, no forms, no deeds, no works, no payments (seed sowing and donations) but by grace alone! "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: "Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).¹⁷

Without grace, justification was impossible. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). The forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace! Seeing that grace is made available for all, what more do you want; why delays? Why do you not accept this gift? "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). It is God's command that we make the message of His grace known to all men.

¹⁷ Cornelius R. Stam, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Stevens Point, Wisconsin, USA: Worzalla Publishing co, 1998), 35

God says through Paul, "Do not tamper with my grace. Do not change it in any way; do not confuse it with the law or the Sermon on the Mount or with Peter's message at Pentecost. This is a further revelation; if you corrupt it you will bring a curse upon yourselves and upon those to whom you minister." It is not according to how much we repent or try to do better; but by His grace. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

It is pertinent to take note of this verse about the riches of grace in II Corinthians 8:9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." Also Ephesians 2:7: "That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."¹⁸

The law does not earn us justification but the righteousness of God through faith and was made available by grace; God's justification is an act of sheer grace. There is no one to condemn for God's grace will justify or acquit. Philips is of the opinion that grace completely swallows law and its consequences – that is death; and that eternal life of God through Jesus Christ is guaranteed unto men by grace which produces righteousness as its essence.¹⁹

Comparing Law and Grace

In Pauline thought, the law has no power to save a sinner rather than keeping of the law for salvation brings death at its end while grace through faith brings salvation. Paul reveals that no one can be declared righteous by keeping the Law (Rom. 3:20; 8:3; Gal. 2:15-16). He comes to the conclusion that God requires complete obedience from his children and that any deliberate violation of God's law will result in condemnation. No one can live in perfect obedience to the law, no one can be declared righteous by keeping the law. God manifested his will in the law so Christ is the fulfillment of the law. Anyone that has got Jesus has got the whole essence of the law. In the words of Apostle John, "...in him all the law and the prophets." According to Sebastian Kizhakkayil, "from Adam to Christ, Paul sees a passage from sin and death, and from law to life in the Spirit. The law was intended to keep human beings away from sin but it becomes the instrument of sin."²⁰

¹⁸Cornelius R. Stam, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Stevens Point, Wisconsin, USA: Worzalla Publishing co, 1998), 35

¹⁹F.P. Philips, *Letters to Young Churches: A Transition of the New Testament Epistles* (London: Geoffrey Bless Ltd, 1947), 190.

²⁰Sebastian Kizhakkayil, *The Pauline Epistles: An Exegetical Study*, Bandra: St Paul Press, 2006), 185.

Frank Thelma sees continuity between Judaism and the new era inaugurated by Christ. The Hebrew Bible and other writings from the second temple period reveal a pattern of thinking that runs from plight to solution. The Literature reveals Israel's plight as an inability to obey God's law. In the eschaton, God will deliver Israel and will enable her to keep the law from a renewed heart. An examination of Romans and Galatians reveals that Paul's thinking remains within this eschatological pattern and runs from plight to solution.²¹ For Westerholm²², Paul sees a very real contrast between law and grace. A humanity that is unable to meet the requirements of the law must necessarily rely on God's grace for salvation. Grace, Westerholm says, is central to Paul's doctrine of justification.

Cruz Pachelo²³ in his Theses on the Relationship of Law and Grace in the Hermeneutics of New Covenant Theology x-rayed Luther's position on law and grace. He says, Luther, with his spiritual experience as an analogical basis, elaborated a theological method and system centered on the article of justification by faith. Luther employed this principle in his critical attempt to evaluate the authority of each one of the books of the Biblical canon, and by doing so created a canon within the Biblical canon. The result was clearly visible in Luther's understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament: a complex position encompassing a tension between continuity and discontinuity. The unity was asserted by the implementation of the theological categories of law and gospel. Luther found the gospel category, namely, the gospel of justification by faith through Christ to be present in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. He also found the law category to be present in both Testaments. The primary difference between the Testaments concerning the gospel principle was attested by a transition from promise in the Old Testament to fulfillment in the New Testament. The discontinuity came from an understanding of the law principle that separated the ethical demands of the New Testament as a book for Christians. "Luther's ultimate concern was to understand the meaning of the Biblical revelation of God, especially in connection to the way in which we relate to God as sinners."²⁴ Althaus suggests that Luther did "theological criticism" by employing the Christological principle to determine what books of the Bible stay true to the central message of the Bible, and to determine the "apostolicity" of the Biblical books of the New Testament. The way in which Luther employed the

²¹F. Thelma, *From Plight to Solution, A Jewish Framework for Understanding of the Law in Galatians and Romans* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989).

²²S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith, Paul and His Recent Interpreters*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988.

²³Cruz Pachelo, J. Carlos, "The Relationship of Law and Grace in the Hermeneutics of New Covenant Theology" (2017). Master's Theses. 100. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/theses/100> (p. 9-13)

²⁴Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1966), 82-86.

Christological principle is discussed further by Althaus in the section titled “The Old Testament and the New”²⁵.

Sometimes, Luther uses “law” in reference to the Mosaic Law and, sometimes, he uses it in reference to commands in general. In the case of the word “gospel,” he makes reference to either “justification by faith, the NT, or any exhibit of grace found in Scripture.” The identification of law as demand and gospel as statement was instrumental in the development of his theological system and a theoretical basis for the Reformation. The totality of the content of the Old Testament that could be classified as law was an exclusive concern of the Jewish nation, and as such, of no concern to the Christian believer. Althaus clearly states that Luther validated the idea of a natural law for Christian ethics even if these laws were given in Old Testament times. He proceeds to clarify: “As far as law of Moses agrees with this natural law it is also valid for and binding on us non-Jews. It binds us, however, not because it is the Law of Moses but because it binds our conscience by being in our hearts”²⁶. The law makes demands while the gospel does not make any demands. In other words, the law says do, while the gospel says done. Luther’s distinction between law and grace, anchored in the doctrine of justification, becomes particularly relevant in light of the historical position of the Catholic Church. In Catholicism, justification is a two-part process that includes both “the remission of sins” and “a transformation of the inner man.” In other words, justification in Catholic theology is not merely a legal transaction, but also an infused power that enables people to obey God’s law.²⁷ Even though God initiates the process of justification based on Christ’s merits, the divine help offered through the Spirit allows humans to merit a particular kind of justification. Justification in Catholic theology encompasses both the divine satisfaction made possible by Christ’s sacrifice and the sanctification grounded on our meritorious work—which, in turn, results from the Spirit-infused power given to the believers. In terms of the categories of gospel and law, Luther believed that a radical distinction between the two had to be made in relation to justification. Some scholars have asked whether grace for salvation is a God-given ability infused in us, or the work of Christ on the cross for us. If it is a God-given ability, then grace and good works are not mutually exclusive”. In Catholic theology, Houghton argues, “The death and resurrection of Christ are important to the gospel, but so also is our grace-enabled obedience”²⁸.

²⁵ Paul Althaus, 86-89

²⁶ Paul Althaus 90-91

²⁷ Robert D. Preus, “Luther and the Doctrine of Justification,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48, No. 1 (January 1984),36

²⁸ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1966), 138.

The primary issue in evaluating Catholic teaching concerning law is its role in our salvation. Is the law good news, that is an attainable way of salvation; or is it bad news, that is, a standard of perfection that condemns? If it is good news, then it can save us. If it is bad news, then its purpose is to show us how really sinful we are. At times the catechism seems to present God's law as bad news but at other times, the catechism seems to imply that eternal life is obtained by keeping the Ten Commandments.

In his thesis, Luther explained that: The gospel is a preaching of the incarnate Son of God, given to us without any merit on our part for salvation and peace. It is a work of salvation, a word of grace....But the law is a word of destruction, a word of wrath, a word of sadness, a word of grief, a voice of the judge and the defendant, a word of relentlessness, a word of curse.²⁹ In Galatians 3:2, the reconciliation of humans with God was exclusively possible through Jesus, and because of that, the function of the law in this reconciliation was only the (the pedagogical use, i.e, the law as a mirror). And it was in reference to this understanding of the law-grace relationship that other Reformers after Luther elaborated their positions.

Therefore the Law and the Gospel are two altogether contrary doctrines. Accordingly, to put righteousness into the Law is simply to conflict with the Gospel. For the law is a taskmaster; it demands that we work and that we give. In short, it wants to have something from us. The Gospel, on the contrary, does not demand; it grants freely; it commands us to hold our hands and to receive what is being offered. Now demanding and granting, receiving and offering, are exact opposites and cannot exist together³⁰. It is necessary to clarify that although the mirror was the only use Luther saw fit to be integrated into the doctrine of justification, his general presentation of the role of the law in the life of the believer included a twofold use of the law, namely, the mirror and the curb. While the first one refers to the law in function of showing the true situation of humans and their separation from God, thus creating the condition necessary for grace, the second one refers to the function of the law as a restrainer of sin by producing fear of judgment.

Conclusion

In these critical times shall we not make it our one passion to know God's Word, rightly divided, and to make it known to others, until the grace of God shines forth again as a blazing torch? The professing church yet today prefers forms and ceremonies, rites and

²⁹Eric Lund, ed., *Documents from the History of Lutheranism, 1517-1750*, (Minneapolis, IN: Fortress, 2002), 22.

³⁰Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, in *Luther's Works*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, Helmut T. Lehmann, (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 1963), 26:208

rituals, to the simple, wonderful message and program of grace. They still proclaim the Law and the Sermon on the Mount, rather than the great truths of the epistles of St. Paul to the churches. And when we try to recover these truths for the Church, and show the difference we are often asked, "Do you mean that the Church has been wrong for 1900 years and only you are right?"³¹

It is not a matter of our being right. We are simply pointing out what the Word of God says. The Church *has* been *wrong* in many of its teachings or it would not be in such deep confusion and division as that which grips it today. The Church today is no better than Israel of old when the nation kept departing from the Law of Moses as God had given it. The Church keeps departing today from God's message and Program of grace as revealed through the Apostle Paul. The departure among the Corinthians from the message of grace began when they embraced moral permissiveness, a partisan spirit, and things of the flesh. The Colossians departed from the gospel through false doctrine brought in from without. Among the Galatians, it was *legalism* that caused them to question Paul's apostleship and his message of grace. They returned to the Law of Moses, with all its ceremonies and requirements.

The Church has been mostly wrong, and only partly right. There have been only a faithful few who have remained true to the unadulterated gospel of the grace of God as committed by the glorified Lord to and through the Apostle Paul. In Acts 19:10, we are told that "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord." Through the message of the gospel, former pagans burnt their books and idols and leaving their heathenism, "*so mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed*" as the Apostle Paul preached the message of grace. How greatly the apostle was used of God in this province in Asia Minor! Yet in his last letter, he wrote to Timothy at Ephesus, "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me..." (II Tim. 1:15). What a sad statement! The departure from Paul and his message of grace started in his own lifetime, and the declaration of this message has declined since then in the Church. The Church has become more and more formalistic, and more and more legalistic, and has remembered less and less of the great message of grace. Yes, this decline has continued ever since Paul.

The Church today is confused and divided, operating on dogmas, therefore needs to go back to the word of God, rightly divided. Grace is a necessity in the life of every believer. No matter one's qualifications, without grace no one can thrive. Paul recognized the fact that what he is in his apostleship was by grace. His ability to endure the "thorn in the flesh" is a function of grace of God. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds them

³¹ Cornelius R. Stam, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Stevens Point, Wisconsin, USA: Worzalla Publishing co, 1998), 37

that their own accomplishments have nothing to do with merit. Furthermore, whatever gifts they have come from God. God equips the Church in the midst of oppositions and by his grace, gives believers ability to help other believers.

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