



## **AMAZING GRACE – Part 9**

*'Free From Accusation'*

by Rev. Robert Griffith

As we saw in the last two sermons, the Apostle Paul speaks of the law of God in a positive and in a negative way. In the positive sense, the law is a tutor; it brings us to Christ; it reveals God's will to us; it reveals the majesty and holiness of God. Paul has lots of good things to say about the law. The law becomes negative when it's used as a way of judging us or assessing our behaviour in order to improve our relationship with God or derive a blessing from Him. Here Paul is talking about the law being used in a religious sense and about the man-made rules and codes that are added to the law of God by which we are supposedly judged by God and by which we judge one another.

That's exactly what the Pharisees had been doing when Jesus' showed up in town. They had hundreds of laws all supposedly derived from the Law of God – the Ten Commandments. One of the terrible things about the law (used in this negative sense) is that first of all it completely corrupts our relationship with God from our perspective because we start trying to relate to God through our performance. For example, under the law - prayer, Bible study, worship, service and obedience become requirements. Under grace, in Christ, the same things are the fruit of something within us, or more precisely, Someone within us and that Someone is Jesus.

Without faith in Jesus Christ it is impossible to fully experience God. **The only way you can have a relationship with God is to believe that God has already done everything for you. All you have to do is believe it, receive it, participate in it, enjoy it and let that power produce fruit in your life.** Those good works everyone exhorts you to 'do' will actually happen automatically. He gives His grace, love, mercy, power and intimacy as a free gift and from that gift, fruit will grow spontaneously.

Not only does the law wreck our love relationship, our new covenant with God, it also wrecks our relationship with each other. Once we have the law which judges exterior behaviour, we can say, *"I'm doing pretty good and you're not."* ... or ... *"You're doing pretty good and I'm not!"* Instead, we should be saying, *"You're O.K. with God because Jesus has made you O.K. That means you're O.K. with me too! So now let's see how we can spur one another on to love and good works."*

Good works are still important. How do we know what kind of tree it is if we can't see the fruit? How do we know what's in us if it doesn't show? How do we reveal the character, love and beauty of Jesus Christ if it's not by what we do which is radically different to most of the world around us? Good works are the fruit of the power of God within us. If you're not producing the fruit of the gospel - if you're not a fruit-bearing disciple of Jesus - then the only conclusion I can draw from Scripture is that you have never tasted the grace of God in the first place; OR, you've tasted it once but like the Galatians did, you have allowed the enemy to drag you back under the law so that now you're now striving to produce fruit which will never come. You cannot be a fruitful Christian by trying to obey the law of God. If that was even possible, Jesus didn't need to come and die in your place.

When you understand grace in all it's truth, you will just do what you do out of love and you'll enjoy it and then you'll go out and do it some more! You will encourage others as you do it and you will give people a place to rest up when they fail. Not *if* they fail, but *when* they fail - it's inevitable.

When you fail you need someone to accept you and love you anyway, because those who succeed are no different to those who fail. We are what we are by the grace of God! That acceptance is what the body of Christ is all about. The law was a heavy burden in Jesus' day. Jesus came into a society that was riddled with sin. There was organised crime, sexual immorality, political oppression, military occupation, slavery, and the violation of human rights. However Jesus never ran a campaign against any of those things, as much as I'm sure He detested them. Jesus' strongest criticism and condemnation was actually reserved for religion! Jesus ran a campaign against the law. Here's my paraphrase of Luke 11:46:

*"You Pharisees, you teachers of the law - you bind up heavy burdens - you make people feel guilty because they're not living up to an impossible standard - and then you do nothing to lift that burden or make it possible for them to carry it."*

But this same Jesus says:

*"Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden - come unto me all you who are under the yoke of the law - and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)*

In Greek the word translated here as 'rest' is a very strong word. Jesus is effectively saying, "Come to me and I will give you a permanent vacation from the law." When most people think about the great conflict or war that's going on in the New Testament, they think in terms of good versus evil, as personified in Jesus versus Satan. I want to suggest that this is not the case at all. Whilst the battle of good against evil is certainly present, I would suggest that the greatest conflict in the New Testament is between Jesus and the law (in the negative sense).

*"From the fullness of his grace (speaking of Jesus) we have all received one blessing after another. For the law (by contrast) was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:16-17)*

The great conflict in the New Testament is not between Jesus and Satan but between Jesus and the law. We see the same thing in Paul's letter to the Galatians:

*"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." (Galatians 2:15-16)*

Throughout the New Testament you have this contrast: you can try (in vain) to have a relationship with God through the law, or you can have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. That is not to say that Satan is unimportant as a player in that battle. However, more often than not, Satan uses the law (i.e. our wrong understanding of the law) to achieve his purpose. But as we will see soon, the power of Satan just melts away as we understand and walk in God's amazing grace and come out from under the yoke of the law.

There are many Christians who go to great lengths and engage in all kinds of spiritual warfare to get Satan out of their way. I believe that the devil will be automatically repelled and defeated as we begin to understand grace in all its truth. For as we'll see later in this series, the grace of God embodies the power of God, and when we understand that, the power of God is released in us to live a victorious Christian life, without ranting, raving or yelling at Satan. In the New Testament, the greatest threat to the relationship that God desires for each of us is the law, in the restrictive, legalistic sense. It is a greater and more powerful enemy than Satan.

Paul makes this point clearly in the following words to the Colossians:

*“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”* (Colossians 2:13-15)

Jesus triumphed by the cross - by keeping the law perfectly to the bitter end and by taking the punishment once and for all for our inability to keep the law. The law was intended to say, *“You're O.K. and you're not.”* That's its power. The cross took that power away. Through the blood sacrifice of Christ, we are accepted by God, independent of the law. The law is useless as a tool against you once you understand that you're forgiven.

In Revelation 12:10 Satan is referred to as the accuser - that's actually what his name means. That's why the law is such a powerful weapon in his hands. Take away any reference to the law and the accuser is out of business. If you forget everything else, remember this: **When you were dead in sin, God made you alive! He took away the code that defined your sins, and by doing that, He disarmed the principalities and powers. He disarmed Satan.** Jesus made a public spectacle of Satan: dragging him through the streets, so to speak - defenceless, weaponless and an object of mockery.

A major reason why some people are depressed and burnt out in the Church and not living a victorious, joyful, fruitful, abundant Christian life, is because they still live under the condemnation of the accuser. They may well be born-again Christians, but they still listen to the lying voice of their old master. We need to understand the tactics of the enemy who accuses us night and day before God. When you know the truth, the truth will set you free from all accusation.

Imagine for a moment that you are taken to court and are standing before the Judge. The prosecuting Attorney (the accuser) says: *“I accuse this person of this crime.”* The Judge asks, *“What law has this person broken?”* Because of the finished work of Jesus, the accuser is forced to say, *“Well, actually, your Honour, now that you mention it ... there isn't any law - it was nailed to the cross.”* The Judge's response is quick and decisive: *“Then I rule that in the absence of a law to convict them – they shall go free!”*

We need to accept that we still sin. Yet, here's the point: there isn't a law that it relates to any more. The law has been taken away and nailed to the cross! The legal means of convicting you and sentencing you and the power of accusation has been taken away. It exists only in your fallen imagination and tortured conscience. So invite Jesus into that conscience and ask Him to heal you.

*“Jesus said: But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set.”* (John 5:45)

In this verse Moses represents the law - the good and glorious law that reveals God's perfection, His standard, His holiness, His heart. As wonderful and as glorious as it is, Jesus describes it as the accuser and He says, *“Do not think I will accuse you before the Father.”* Let the lights go on here! This is pure gold for the poverty-stricken, religious Church! Jesus says don't even *think* that I will accuse you! He couldn't make it any clearer if He tried. Your accuser is the law - and those religious and demonic powers that still use the law against you. That is why the preaching of grace disarms religion - it disarms the devil. When you understand that the law is taken away, then the power to accuse, the power to squash your spiritual life and expression, or to depress and burn you out as a believer is completely removed.

When the things that suppress the gospel in you are disarmed and taken away, the fruit of the Spirit (which you have been sweating and struggling to manufacture yourself) just rises up from the depths of your being, by the power of God's amazing grace. When that happens - your overwhelming joy, positive attitude and good works will just ooze out of you because they're no longer suppressed by the accuser. Jesus says, *'Think instead, that because I am in you, rivers of living water and life and fruit will spontaneously flow out of you. I have come to give you life and life more abundantly. It's the enemy that comes to rob and to steal and to destroy, to bring guilt and shame and fear and depression!'*

All over the world, the devil is being re-armed every day - especially on Sundays! So many preachers are unconsciously re-arming the devil by preaching sermons full of shoulds and oughts and 'do more, try harder' guilt trips. You've got to hand it to Satan - he's a lot of despicable things, but he's not stupid. He's been using this for over 2000 years and because it works so well, he's not going to give it up.

**The blessings, gifts, power and fruit of God are already in you! The Bible says, 'Christ is in you, the hope of glory.' Everything that is in Christ is in you. You simply need to believe that and act on it.**

It's so simple that many of us miss it! When that revelation comes from the Holy Spirit, your whole life and relationship with God and others will be transformed. We need to pray that God will give us this liberating, empowering revelation. Colossians 1:6 tells us that the gospel of Jesus Christ will spread across this community, this nation and all over the world - it will grow and bear fruit - when we understand God's grace in all it's truth.

The Apostle Paul warned us about this battle between Jesus and the law a long time ago:

*"Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone (in light of the law) but on tablets of human hearts. (in your very personality) Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."* (2 Corinthians 3:1-7)

He's talking to Christians here – and so am I. It's amazing that with the life of Christ inside, so many believers still feel dead. They're not just tired - they are spiritually burned out! That is what the law does to Christians! It continues to rob you spiritually, emotionally and relationally. Death of every kind is the ministry of the law!

By stark contrast, the grace of God, when understood in all it's truth, releases the life of Christ in you. When you are born again, that life is put into you. I have every confidence in the gospel. I have confidence in the life of Christ in you. When the religious load is taken off you, the life that is in you can manifest and bubble up spontaneously! So I have confidence in the Holy Spirit's gifts in you. I know that they are in there and all we have to do is encourage them to be released into your Church and into your community and into this nation. Then the sleeping giant will finally be awakened and the world will see the Church as she was always meant to be!

Let me finish by including some selections from Romans 3,4 & 5 from *The Message*. May the Lord bring understanding as you read these very powerful words of truth.

*“But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in him ... Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners ... and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public - to set the world in the clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured.*

*This is not only clear, but it's now - this is current history! God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in his rightness ... God does not respond to what we do; we respond to what God does. We've finally figured it out. Our lives get in step with God and all others by letting him set the pace, not by proudly or anxiously trying to run the parade ... God sets right all who welcome his action and enter into it ... But by shifting our focus from what we do to what God does, don't we cancel out our careful keeping of the rules and ways God commanded? Not at all. What happens, in fact, is that by putting that entire way of life in its proper place, we confirm it.*

*So how do we fit what we know of Abraham, our first father in the faith, into this new way of looking at things? If Abraham, by what he did for God, got God to approve him, he could certainly have taken credit for it. But the story we're given is a God-story, not an Abraham-story. What we read in Scripture is, "Abraham entered into what, God was doing for him, and that was the turning point. He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own." If you're a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don't call your wages a gift. But if you see that the job is too big for you, that it's something only God can do, and you trust him to do it - you could never do it for yourself no matter how hard and long you worked - well, that trusting him to do it is what gets you set right with God, by God. Sheer gift ...*

*That famous promise God gave Abraham - that he and his children would possess the earth - was not given because of something Abraham did or would do. It was based on God's decision to put everything together for him, which Abraham then entered when he believed. If those who get what God gives them only get it by doing everything they are told to do and filling out all the right forms properly signed, that eliminates personal trust completely and turns the promise into an ironclad contract! That's not a holy promise; that's a business deal. A contract drawn up by a hard-nosed lawyer and with plenty of fine print only makes sure that you will never be able to collect. But if there is no contract in the first place, simply a promise - and God's promise at that - you can't break it.*

*This is why the fulfilment of God's promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way, and then simply embracing him and what he does. God's promise arrives as a pure gift. That's the only way everyone can be sure to get in on it, those who keep the religious traditions and those who have never heard of them ... By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us - set us right with him, make us fit for him - we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand - out in the wide, open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing, tall and shouting our praise.”*

How then shall we live? Free from accusation ... by His grace ... and for His glory!

1. Read through this week's sermon once without taking notes or highlighting anything ... just to get the big picture. Go through the text more closely. Highlighting or underlining key phrases or paragraphs which stand out as significant to you. What single statement impacted you the most? How will that now change your life? Write down what you need to do to respond to God's truth today.

2. Ponder the following statements from this week's sermon. What practical implications could or should flow from each of these statements? If you ask "How then shall I live?" in light of each of these truths, what would be your answer?

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