

AMAZING GRACE – Part 8

'The Law and the Promise (2)'

by Rev. Robert Griffith

Last week we began to explore the Apostle Paul's explanation of the law of God as mediated by the Old Covenant and the promise of God as mediated by the New Covenant in Christ. We spent some time in Galatians chapter three where Paul talks about the purpose of the law and how everything changed when Jesus came. Paul also discusses the difference between the Old and New Covenants in his letter to the Romans and to do this he uses the analogy of marriage. The concepts are a little complicated, but absolutely essential to our understanding of the Christian life. Let me take you through the first six verses of Romans chapter 7:

"Do you not know, brothers - for I am speaking to men who know the law .."

Now that's crucial. Paul is speaking to people who know the law; have a relationship to the law; are bound by the law; are intimidated by the law and have been under the law. Many who grow up in the Church today are sadly still in this category.

"... that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law ..."

One reason why it's complicated is that Paul jumps from his analogy of marriage to our relationship to the law. He was talking about the husband dying - now he's talking about us dying.

"... you died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God ... But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

Now this may be harder for men than women, but I want to encourage you to enter into this analogy today and let God teach you. You were born 'married' to the law. The law was your 'husband,' and you stay married until 'death do you part'. What's so bad about that? Isn't the law a holy husband? Yes, absolutely. This is God's law – pure and right. In its own way the law is good and Jesus said the law will never pass away, so what is bad about being married to the law? Well first of all, this husband can only relate to you in a negative way. The law only ever tells you what *not* to do. Don't lie, don't steal, don't lose your temper, don't sleep in, don't speed, don't lust, don't gain weight, don't spend too much money, don't in any way be unfaithful to the law. The only word you ever hear from this husband is a rebuke or a correction.

This husband will never comfort or encourage you; never give you understanding and never praise you. There are no extenuating circumstances. If you break the law, you must be punished and that's all there is to it. For example, a highway patrol officer is an instrument of the law, and when you see those blue lights in your rear view mirror, you know what's coming! Is the policeman likely to pull you over to compliment you on your superb driving? No! He's there to enforce the law.

He's there to tell you what you did wrong and punish you for it. Law only speaks when it is offended. That's your husband from birth. That's the relationship that you were born into and that describes religion perfectly! Your conscience is also like the highway patrol. It's a function of law. You may get past the radar or the speed trap, but your conscience never sleeps. Your conscience is there to accuse you of wrong and to dispense the punishment through anxiety, depression or guilt.

So your husband (the law) is impersonal; he's always right; you cannot appeal to him; he always speaks in condemning tones. His strength is fear of punishment, and he never lifts a finger to help you. This is what the Pharisees were all about and why Jesus said:

Luke 11:46 *"You Pharisees, you teachers of the law, you tie up heavy burdens and put them on people's backs and you never lift a finger to help them."*

That's how Jesus described the law and the worst thing of all: this husband never dies! He will always outlive you. Jesus said the law will never pass away. As well as that, it will never change its nature. However Paul said we are no longer under law. How can both be true? Let's work through this slowly. Read from verse 2 of Romans 7 again:

Romans 7:2-4 *"For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another."*

If you're married to the law until death, then one of you has to die for you to be freed from the law. We already know the law is never going to die, so it has to be you! One of the realities of the Christian life is that those who have believed into Christ - have participated in His experience. Part of His experience is death. Therefore, if you have believed into Christ, you no longer have any obligation whatsoever to the law because you have died to the law. Let's flick back a chapter.

Romans 6:3-4 *"Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."*

So your old life is in the past. The life that you now live, you live in a sense beyond the grave. This is a little hard to grasp because the day after you believed in Christ you looked in the mirror and saw the same person that you saw the previous day. People still waved to you and knew who you were. But spiritually speaking, you died to your old husband. This is a great mystery but as far as God is concerned, your old life is dead and if you believe that truth and act on it - you will experience the power and reality of that new life. The Spirit of God will make it a reality for you. If you're waiting for it to make sense, like I was for years, and never act on it - you'll never experience it.

Your conscience is a function of law. It will still accuse you because you have broken the law of God. Religion is also a function of law. It doesn't want to go out of business, so it doesn't want you to embrace this truth. Most of all, the devil doesn't want you to embrace this truth, because if you do, you will no longer be subject to him in any way. At the beginning of Galatians 3, Paul says very strongly: *"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?"* The Greek term behind the word 'bewitched' is the same term used for someone under the influence of an evil spell or a demonic spirit of some kind. It is linked to Satan and his power and it is much stronger in the Greek than it is in English.

It was the only explanation Paul could come up with for why they would exchange the freedom they had experienced in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the law and religion. Satan uses the law of God more than any of us think. He wants us to try and keep the law to prove that we are good – then we can boast and be proud; OR, he wants us to fail so we can feel guilty. Either one is OK with the devil, he wins both ways - both pride and guilt will destroy our experience of the life in Christ in us.

You live in a world in which Satan roams to and fro, a world in which religion and religious spirits run rampant. However, you can live *in* that world and not be *of* that world. The devil will still accuse; religion will still nag, but you can get to the point where none of that has any effect on you. This is what God wants for you and that means He's going to help you get free - if you'll let Him. The first step is to be absolutely convinced from the Bible, and by the Holy Spirit, that what I am saying here is all true.

When you believed into Christ, you were freed from the law and put on the right side of the law. Your relationship to the law is now null and void - due to death. So all those religious do's and don'ts have no more power over you. Instead of a husband who never lifts a finger to help you, your new Husband is Jesus. You can do all things through this new Husband Who strengthens you. Your new Husband doesn't just help you with the 'spiritual' part of your life - He helps you in everything and with everything.

There are also now no rules, there is only a relationship. Your new husband is always there; He's attentive; He can be reasoned with; He's helpful; He's encouraging; He blesses you; He's always saying He loves you; He's always picking you up when you fall. When you do sin, all you have to do is talk it over with Him. His love and acceptance of you is unaltered by your sin because He was punished for it long ago.

Most importantly your new Husband, unlike the law, is able to produce life and fruit in you. He impregnates you with the ministry of the kingdom of God. Through the intimacy - listen carefully here - through the intimacy of prayer, Bible reading, worship, listening and responding to good teaching, obedience, fellowship with other believers etc. ... this life which He put in you is released. Through your own personal devotion to Him, that intimacy impregnates you with life and in time, the fruit will come.

Now this rescue from the old husband, the law, and your transfer into a relationship with your new husband, Jesus, is an unconditionally free gift. It comes costing the Giver everything, but costing you nothing. It is cataclysmic and radical. Yet this happened to many of us without even a ripple. Part of the problem is that it didn't cost you anything - which is the whole point! You see, the beauty of grace is also the problem of grace. You cannot and should not try to pay for this gift by your obedience or sacrifice. To attempt to do so, by anything you do for God or for others, is to cheapen something of inestimable value.

The other thing you're doing is attempting the impossible! You are trying to buy something that's free, and you just can't do that. God has nothing to sell and even if He did ... you have nothing with which to buy it. You are spiritually bankrupt. Whatever you have has to come from Him in the first place! The radical truth which lies at the heart of the gospel is that **you owe God nothing for your salvation!** The riches of His grace and His eternal kingdom have been lavished upon you as a free gift. And that makes religious people very nervous and often quite angry. Look at this powerful illustration of grace in Luke's gospel. Jesus is dying on a cross along with two criminals. What happens is as shocking as it is amazing!

Luke 23:32-43 *"Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals - one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, (I want you to know something. This is the first time anybody calls the Lord 'Jesus.' This thief uses the familiar first name of Jesus - but everybody else calls Him Lord, Master or teacher) "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Do you see what just happened? A man asked for a gift and got it - just like that! What had he done to deserve that? Nothing. How much time did he have to love and serve and obey Jesus as payment for that gift? None whatsoever. He had nothing but sin, stupidity, broken opportunities, abuse, neglect and irresponsibility - that was his life and from that pit of sin he simply asked Jesus: 'Remember me, won't you?' And Jesus didn't hesitate: 'Today, you'll be with me in paradise.' There's Jesus Himself - giving the free gift of God's grace and eternal life. No confession, repentance, baptism, fruitful life and he certainly wasn't on a Church membership roll. But there and then, Jesus gives this man eternal life. That story makes the little Pharisee inside us want to vomit and people get angry and try to explain away this whole scene as some special, exceptional circumstance. There's nothing exceptional about that scene. That story is the gospel. That is the good news! That is GRACE.

Why are we humans suspicious of something that is free? Perhaps if we had to work for years to buy our eternal freedom - it might be more real to us. Ask Jesus dying on the cross if it's real; ask Jesus dying on the cross if it cost anything to get you out of the old husband's house and into the new husband's house. Ask Jesus if it's cataclysmic; ask Jesus if it's radical! That realisation is only possible by the supernatural illumination of the Holy Spirit and it will change your attitude and actions from then on. To ask you to keep the law of God then would be stupid! Your heart will be so full and overwhelmed by the reality of what God has done for you and in you, that you'll be doing much more than the law requires anyway - and you'll be doing it because you want to, not because you have to. Yet none of that will happen until you believe this is the truth; nothing will change until you believe the heart and soul of the gospel.

Look at these powerful words from Paul to you as first recorded in Romans 5:

Romans 5:12-19 *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned - for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, ... But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."*

Paul reminds us that Adam was the head of the human race. In fact in the beginning, Adam was the human race. So when Adam sinned, he took the whole human race with him and we all came under the judgement of God. We were born as a child of that first Adam and came under the law. We were born married to the law. After we believed and became a Christian, our experience was that of the second Adam - Jesus Christ. The gift that came was Jesus, who gathered us up into Himself. We were born again into a new life, subject to the new Husband - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul sums it up in one sentence when he said:

Romans 6:23 *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.”*

This is where faith comes in. When you believe the gospel of God’s amazing grace and act on it - it will become your experience. Legalism can creep into our lives whenever we start to trust in anything we do, say or think, to improve our performance or standing with God apart from Jesus and His ongoing love, acceptance and work in us.

God is a God of grace. His nature is to give and invite and include. The holy standards expressed in the law show us God’s purity, holiness and righteousness, and point us to His plan and purpose in Christ for bringing His lost children home to Him. In that sense the law is a promise to us. **The law gives us a picture of who we are becoming in Christ**– not in our own strength. Understanding God’s law and its purpose shows us our dependency on Christ and draws us closer to Him. It is a tutor which leads us into maturity in Christ.

We were given a new relationship and new life in Christ Jesus when we believed into His life, death and resurrection. He has become our new Husband and He births fruit in us which leads to life. In Him alone, we have a right standing with God, so we can throw the rule book out of the window. The message of grace is as simple as it is powerful ... we have peace with God just as we are ... and it all came to us free - in Christ, through Christ, for Christ.

Believe it, receive it and then watch everything change in you and around you!

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?

One of the many wonderful realities of the Christian life is that those who have believed into Christ have participated in His experience. Part of His experience is death. Therefore, if you have believed into Christ, you no longer have any obligation whatsoever to the law. You have died to it.

*The radical truth which lies at the heart of the gospel is that you owe God nothing for your salvation!
The riches of His grace and His eternal kingdom have been lavished upon you as a free gift.*

The law gives us a picture of who we are becoming in Christ – not in our own strength. A proper understanding of God's law and its purpose only shows us our dependency on Christ and draws us closer to Him. It is a tutor to lead us into maturity in Christ.

The message of grace is as simple as it is powerful ... we have peace with God just as we are ... and it all came to us free in Christ, through Christ, for Christ.