

Law & Grace

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores the relationship between the law of Moses and salvation, highlighting the importance of the Holy Spirit's guidance and the contrast between the Catholic Church's view of tradition and scripture.

Duration: 48:11

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 16:9, Psalm 100:2, Acts 15:3-12, 2 Corinthians 3:17, 1 Peter 5:2

Topics: "Spiritual Freedom", "Gods Grace"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that God is able and willing to meet all our needs. He highlights that God's eyes are constantly searching the earth for those whose hearts are in tune with Him, so that He can show Himself strong on their behalf. The preacher encourages the audience to get their hearts in tune with God in order to receive His blessings and ministry. He also acknowledges the challenge of living in a fast-paced world, where it is difficult to find time for spiritual communion and meditation. The sermon includes references to Bible verses, such as Galatians 5:1, which urges believers to stand fast in the liberty that Christ has given them and not be entangled again in bondage.

Transcript

Let's turn now in our Bibles to Acts chapter 15. And tonight we begin with verse 3. Paul wrote to the Galatians, Stand fast in the liberty wherein Christ has set you free, And be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Jesus has set us free from the requirements of the law that had been sort of interpreted to the extent that they had become a yoke of bondage.

Now some of the Jews that were in the church in Jerusalem heard how that the Gentile Christians in Antioch were standing fast in the liberty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. One of the most liberating things in the world. And having heard of the liberty of the Gentile believers, they came to Antioch sort of on a mission to spy out things and see if what they had heard about the Gentile believers was actually true.

That they weren't trying to adhere to the law of Moses. They weren't keeping kosher as far as their eating habits. And so they came to spy out the liberty of the believers in Antioch.

And when they saw that these people were indeed set free, rejoicing and loving the Lord and serving the Lord in that wonderful freedom that we have in Christ, they began to create a problem. They sort of expressed a superior kind of a understanding of the scriptures. And more or less intimated that they had the authority of the church in Jerusalem.

And they began to say to the people, unless you become circumcised and you keep the law of Moses, you can't be saved. Now Paul had been preaching to them the glorious gospel of liberty in Christ Jesus. And so when Paul discovered what was being taught by these fellows from Jerusalem, they got into this big argument, great dispute.

And they decided the only way to settle this is to go down to Jerusalem, meet with the church fathers there, and let's get this issue settled as far as the relationship of the Gentile believers to the law of Moses and to the issues that were in the law, circumcision and other things. That was the first church council as they came to Jerusalem. It was the first church council to settle issues of doctrine and faith.

Now, since that time, there have been several church councils that have been called through the history of the church. But I feel that they have strayed far from the first church council. I believe that as we study this first church council, we will discover that the decisions that came from it were directed and led by the Holy Spirit.

Quite obvious that they were looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance in these issues. The Catholic Church called the Council of Trent in 1545 to 1563. It was over three sessions during this period of years.

And it was in Trent, Italy. And it was at this council that the church decreed that scriptures and tradition were equally valid sources for the Catholic faith. So they put tradition on the same level as the scriptures as far as authority for the practice.

They said that tradition includes the writings of the apostles and the decrees of the Pope and the councils and the customs that have been practiced by the Catholic Church. They decreed that the church had the sole right to interpret the scriptures. And the church council also rejected the Protestant view on salvation and sin.

And it was at the second council that they affirmed again the doctrine of transubstantiation. That is, at communion, in a miraculous way, the bread becomes literally the body of Christ and the cup becomes literally the blood of Christ. In the third of these sessions of councils, they defended the granting of indulgences, which was the practice of payment for the pardon from the penalty of sin.

In other words, you could buy your forgiveness. And the prayers to the saints was affirmed as a legitimate experience. Not so the first church council.

They were led and sought the direction of the Holy Spirit. And so we read in verse three, they are heading back to Jerusalem with these men and being brought on their way by the church. Which means that the church provided them with the funds for this journey to Jerusalem.

Now, the distance between Antioch and Jerusalem was about the same distance that we have from San Francisco to Los Angeles. You say, well, that's not very far. Have you ever walked it? It probably took them three weeks or so to make the journey, because they are walking.

Makes a big difference. No Greyhound buses, no jets. They had to walk from Antioch to Jerusalem.

And, you know, there were no Motel 6s. And so they would stop at the churches on the way. And they would visit in the churches and would receive hospitality from the churches.

But imagine living at that slow pace. Hard for us to imagine, isn't it? Thinking of a journey to San Francisco. Walking.

It would take a lot more planning than just getting in your car, filling it up and taking off. But imagine in walking that distance, the opportunities that you would have to commune with the Lord. Now, if you went from here to San Francisco, going up the coast, there is such beautiful coastline.

And I love driving, actually, to Santa Barbara along the coastal route. I love driving up through Big Sur. But when I am driving, especially in the Big Sur area, I really don't have much opportunity to enjoy that gorgeous scenery.

Better not. You can't get too involved in just the beautiful vistas from those high cliffs, you know. You have to keep your mind on the driving.

You have to keep your eyes on the road. And thus, it isn't really a good place to meditate. But imagine if you were walking along that route.

And all of the beautiful scenery that you have. How it would speak to you of God's creative genius. The beauty of it would be just awe-inspiring and would just make you so conscious and aware of God.

So, in reality, they had a lot of advantages over us as far as the ability for spiritual spiritual kind of communion and meditation. Yesterday, I spoke at the Bible College down at Murrieta. And, of course, the drive was about 130 miles round trip.

The traffic was moderately heavy and certainly not a good time for meditation. My brain was constantly occupied with the traffic. Watching the cars in front of me.

Keeping my eye on the rearview mirror. Figuring out how rapidly the car was approaching from the rear. Will I have time to pass the car in front of me that I'm approaching? And my brain is making all of these computations.

Realizing how quickly I'm coming upon the car. Trying to determine about what time I will be there at the car and need to pass. Watching the car behind me.

Computing how fast he is catching up with me. And, you know, should I pass on the right or the left? There's the truck up there on the right. Can I get back in? And all of the computations that are going on.

So that by the time you arrive at Murrieta, you're not really in a full state of deep meditation. And just, oh, Lord, you're so good. And I love you, Lord.

And you're so wonderful. But imagine if you walked to Murrieta. And if I did, I would probably go over Ortega Highway to enjoy the little stream.

And, you know, the beauty of going over that way. And I would dare say that by the time I arrived, I would be in a great spiritual condition. Having had all of that opportunity.

Probably take me three days. But having all of that opportunity to just spend three days sort of walking with the Lord. Allowing Him to speak to my heart.

Opening up my heart to Him and all. And so you can see that it would be of a great advantage, spiritually, if we were living at a slower pace. But in reality, it's just almost impossible to slow down.

Because the world around us is rushing at such a fast pace. Tonight, as Kay and I were driving to church, coming up Irvine Avenue, this pickup truck came whizzing around me. Cut right in there.

I was, you know, not far behind the car on the right. Pulled right in front of me. Whizzed up.

Had to stop at the signal. And I pulled up behind him. He takes off and hurries to the next signal.

I pull up behind him. But we just seem to be living at such a hyped up kind of a pace. Which isn't really conducive for really meditating and getting our hearts upon the Lord and the things of the Lord.

In the question answer session with the students yesterday, one of the students asked the question, why is it that we don't see things like happened in the book of Acts today in the church? And I use this as an illustration. I don't think that we have the opportunity of the same kind of spiritual depth that they could develop because of the slower pace of life and having to walk wherever they went. Walking is very conducive to meditation.

Driving is not. And so our modern society sort of mitigates against deep spirituality. And so as they were walking, they came through Phoenicia or the area of Phoenicia and Samaria.

Now, churches had already been established in these areas. In the 11th chapter of the book of Acts, when Stephen was martyred, it followed by a period of persecution against the church. And as the church fled from Jerusalem, it said some of them went as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus.

And so it said they went everywhere preaching the word. And so churches have been established through the area of Phoenicia, which of course is the area of Lebanon today. And they had to pass through that.

And then coming on through Samaria. And of course, we remember how Philip had gone to Samaria, preached Christ unto them, and many believed him were baptized. And so there were churches established already in these areas.

And as I mentioned earlier, they would stop at the churches for refreshment, for lodging. And as they did, they would share with the churches of the experiences that they had on their first missionary journey. They were sharing with the churches how that the Gentiles were so receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so it was a good experience visiting with the churches, sharing with them the glorious things that God had done. On, it says there was great rejoicing among the brethren when they heard of what the Lord was doing. And of course, the same with us.

When our teams come back from Russia, our teams come back from the Ukraine, or from Hungary and other places, and they tell us of how hungry the people are to receive and to hear the gospel. It's always a time of rejoicing. I mentioned the other day about this door that seems to be opening in India.

I received a little further information on that door that is opening. And on November the 4th in India, which will be Saturday, November the 3rd here. So a week from Saturday, one million people will be gathering in India.

These are people from the lower caste. In fact, the word outcast refers to this caste of people. And one million of them have now enjoyed a college education.

The Indian government, a while back, decided that if they could go through high school, that the universities would be open to many of them. So actually one million of these people from the lowest caste are going to be meeting. And it will be the college graduates that will be meeting, one million of them.

And the leaders have called them together. And the whole idea is leaving Hinduism. Hinduism is a caste system.

And as long as they remain Hindus, they really cannot leave that lowest caste that they are in. And so the conference is being called, The End of Hinduism. And this whole caste is going to renounce Hinduism.

They were going to present to them and give them the opportunity of choice as to what religion they wanted to embrace. They were going to give them the opportunity to embrace Islam or Christianity or Buddhism. After September the 11th, they decided they were not going to offer them Islam.

Did that attack ever backfire on Islam? Because the potential is 300 million people. So they are only going to offer to them Buddhism and Christianity. And they will have representatives from Buddhism and a representative from Christianity to present Buddhism to the people and to present Christianity to the people so that they can make their choice as to what religion they will follow.

These one million, because they are college graduates, are more or less the leaders of this caste of people. They will go back to the rest of the people in this caste to bring to them either Buddhism or Christianity. And the people will have their choice between the two.

The leaders of this caste believe that there will be some 200,000 converts at least to Christianity on November the 4th. And so they have some 5,000 pastors to be there to baptize the 200,000 converts that they expect. On that day.

And they expect that within just about three months there will probably follow about 5 million more converts. An exciting, exciting time. Of course the Hindus have threatened to violently stop this huge rally.

And so there could be some very powerful kind of confrontations taking place. And I tell you that to encourage you to pray. To pray for that man who will be representing Christianity to these people, sharing with them the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Keep him in prayer. One of the greatest opportunities as far as church history is concerned to see this many people being converted to Christianity. So on hearing the news, the churches rejoiced at what Paul and Barnabas were sharing about the reception of the gospel by the Gentiles.

And so we read, When they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and by the apostles and the elders, the general church body, the apostles who were the primary leaders, and then the elders that have been ordained by the apostles to oversee the church. There seems to be, and there definitely was, a difference between the apostles and the elders. And Paul told Titus that he was to ordain elders as he set the church in order.

And we read that Paul and Barnabas, when they had ordained elders in every church and have prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed. And so as they left the churches,

they ordained elders over those churches that were to have the oversight of the church. They were to actually be the overseers of the body of Christ.

Peter wrote to the elders. He said, The elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder and I'm a witness of the sufferings of Christ. I also am a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.

And to the elders, he said, Feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight, not by constraint, but willingly and not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. So they were to take care of the church of God and to have the oversight of the church. So they, Paul and Barnabas then declared to the church in Jerusalem, all of the things that God had done on their first outreach, missionary outreach through Cyprus and into Asia.

The first missionary outreach had been very successful. Many people have been brought to the faith and among those that were brought to the faith, the majority were Gentiles. God had worked many miracles through Paul and Barnabas on that first missionary journey.

And so they were able to share the wonderful things that the Lord had done. The miracles of healing, the miracles of salvation and the churches that were established, the brethren that were established. The last verse of Mark's gospel tells us, And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following.

That's exactly what happened with Paul and Barnabas. As they went, the Lord confirmed the word with signs following the miracles and all. But we read there in Jerusalem.

Verse five, there arose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, which had believed. In other words, some of the Pharisees have been converted. Paul had been a Pharisee.

And some of the Pharisees have now acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah. They have become a part of the church. But they had not really left completely the baggage of the past as a Pharisee.

But they were bringing this baggage into the church. That strict adherence to the laws of Moses. Jesus was constantly at odds with the Pharisees.

At odds with them because they placed the big emphasis upon the outward observances. And inwardly, they were, well, as he said, on the outside, you look like whitewashed sepulchers. You look beautiful, whitewashed.

But inside, you're full of dead men's bones. The outside of the cup is clean, but the inside is filthy. And they were a very self-righteous group because of the fact that they were so punctilious as far as the keeping of the law was concerned.

These were the fellows that Jesus said, you strain at a gnat, but you swallow a camel. The reason they strained at a gnat is because, according to the law, you were not to actually eat anything that wasn't thoroughly bled. So if you're jogging down the street and a gnat happens to go in your mouth, you got to gag yourself, get it out, strain at it.

Because I don't want to eat anything that hasn't been bled. And so they would strain at the gnat. But then Jesus said, you swallow a camel.

In other words, there are these little things that you were so, you know, exacting over these little things. But major things like being fair, being just and all, you just sort of ignored those things. You pay tithe of your mint and your cumin, of your spice garden.

So you'd see these guys counting out seeds. Nine for the Lord, one for me. You know, and he said, you ought to do that.

But there are more important things that you've just completely omitted. So when they came into the church, they brought a lot of their baggage with them. This whole idea of the necessity to keep the Mosaic law, you know, every little aspect of it and to keep it in such an exacting way.

And so the church in Jerusalem was predominantly a Jewish church. Still made up of Jews who had come to recognize that Jesus was the Messiah. But there they were, holding on to the Mosaic law.

Years later, when Paul again came to the church in Jerusalem, and he met with the elders and with James, James said to Paul, Now you see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who now believe. And they are all zealous of the law. So there have been thousands.

It was now a mega church in Jerusalem. But they were still all bound to the law as a standard for righteousness. And they were still trusting in their keeping of the law for a righteous standing before God.

And so, as I said, they brought the baggage with them, unfortunately. Now, when Paul came to Christ, he came without any baggage. He had made a clean break with the past.

His own testimony to the Philippians was, For we worship God in spirit and we rejoice in Christ Jesus, and we have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might have confidence in the flesh, if any other man thinks he has whereof to boast, as far as the flesh is concerned, I have more. Because I was circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel.

I was of the tribe of Benjamin. I was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. As touching the law, I was a Pharisee.

Concerning zeal, I persecuted the church. And touching the righteousness which is of the law, I was blameless. But what things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss. For the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse that I might win Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that I might know him and the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings, be made conformable to his death. So Paul said, I left all that baggage behind.

All of the law and the righteousness which is of the law, those things which I once really looked at as, you know, that put me above others, that sort of caused me to look down on others, I put that, it's refuse, it's junk. The real secret is knowing him, knowing Jesus. And when I came to the knowledge of Jesus, that was so rich, so full, so wonderful, that he is my righteousness.

It is by him that I'm accepted by the Father. It's not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by our faith have we been justified. And when Paul came to this understanding and knowledge, he dumped all of that baggage.

And he came in clean and just rejoicing in what Jesus had done for him, and not in his endeavor to have a righteous standing before God by strict adherence to the law. Unfortunately, many times when people do come into the church, they bring baggage with them. Rather than making a clean break with the past and beginning that wonderful new life in Christ, they bring in a lot of extra baggage.

And oftentimes they want to incorporate into the church some of that baggage. With Martin Luther, he left the Catholic Church, or was excommunicated. They left him because of his 95 theses.

But in starting the Protestant Reformation, he really didn't make a clean break, but he took a lot of baggage with him. He took with him much of the liturgy. He took with him infant baptism, the anti-Semitism, the images of the saints, and a priesthood of sorts, still sort of wearing robes to make you sort of appear to be holy or righteous.

And above the people are more spiritual. That's sort of the, you know, you see a guy with a robe and all, you're like, whoa, you know. And so that, you know, sort of elevate, you know, because I'm wearing a robe, I'm sort of elevated above.

And he took that kind of baggage with him. In the book of Revelation, when Jesus is addressing the churches, when he addresses the church of Sardis, which historically is the Protestant Reformation, he says concerning Sardis, I have not found your works perfect before the Lord. In other words, it wasn't a clean break, but much of the baggage was brought in to the Protestant Reformation.

It wasn't a complete and whole break from the Babylonian system. He brought many of the forms. Of course, the major thing was that God did reveal to Martin Luther that wonderful truth, the just shall live by faith.

And that was really the whole foundation for the Reformation. Justified through faith, not through works, not through penance, not through confessionals, but justified by faith. How wonderful it is when a person comes clean from the past, as did Paul.

And you can just come in and enjoy freely the wonderful works of Jesus. On our behalf. And realize that, you know, it isn't something, my salvation isn't something that is dependent upon me or my works, but it's dependent upon the work that Jesus Christ did for me when he went to the cross and paid the price for my redemption.

Paul was a truly free man. He had the freedom to do or not to do. And that's true freedom.

There are certain things that I feel free to do if I want to do them. I have the liberty and freedom to do them. Many of these things that I feel a freedom in my own mind and conscience to do, I don't do, though I have the freedom to.

I don't do it lest I would lay a stumbling block before my brother who doesn't have that same freedom in mind that I have. And so for love's sake, I don't do a lot of things, though I have freedom to do it. But what is more important to me, there are a lot of things that control people, bring them into bondage.

And I have the freedom not to do those things. I don't have to do those things. I'm not bound by those things.

I've been set free by Jesus Christ. And that's the freedom that I truly enjoy. The freedom not to indulge in those things.

Now, as a Gentile believer, what is my relationship to the law? Say the law of the Sabbath day. Say to the law of circumcision. The law of eating kosher.

Is it wrong for me to eat ham or bacon? These were the issues that were at stake at the First Church Council here in Jerusalem. What relationship a new believer had to the Old Testament law. And then the question, is there a difference then between a Jewish believer and a Gentile believer as far as the law is concerned? And as far as how we relate to God today.

If I'm a Jew, must I relate to God in a different way than a Gentile? Do the Jews have one set of rules and the Gentiles another set of rules? These are the questions we'll be taking up in our next lesson as we look at the Church Council and the decisions that came forth from the Church Council in Jerusalem as they made their decisions as to what relationship the Gentiles would have to Jesus Christ. And so, we'll look with great interest at this because this was an extremely important council. And had the decisions been made different from what they were, Christianity would have been nothing more than just a Jewish sect.

But because of the decisions, Christianity has become a worldwide body of Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles. Father, we thank you for the way you worked in the early church. And for the decisions that came forth from the council.

And for the great liberty that it has brought to us as Gentile believers. And Lord, we thank you for what you're doing in the church today. And that work that you began on the day of Pentecost continues to the present day as your church.

As the body of Christ. We ask, Lord, that you would work in our hearts and lives in a very special way. Draw us closer to you, Lord.

As difficult as it is in our modern society, in our revved up pace of living, help us, Lord, to find time. Help us, Lord, to take time. To just spend in fellowship with you.

In that beautiful communion. Draw our hearts and minds to the things of the Spirit. Give us a greater awareness and consciousness of your presence with us at all times.

Lord, may we commune with you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front tonight. If you're in need of prayer for any cause or reason, they're here to pray for you. And so as soon as we're dismissed, we would encourage you to come on forward and let them pray with you and join with you in prayer for those issues that are tonight.

Pressing on you. Your need of drawing closer to the Lord. Your need of power may be over a besetting sin.

Your need of that wonderful freedom that we can have in Christ Jesus. Whatever the need might be, our God is able and wanting to meet that need. The eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the entire earth.

That he might show himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are in tune with his. And so tonight the secret is just getting your heart in tune with God. God will bless.

God will minister to you. I love you, Lord. And I lift my voice to worship you.

Oh, my soul rejoice. Take joy, my King, in what you hear. May it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.

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