

GRACE, COVENANT AND LAW

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MR. TRENCHARD, who is a member of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research, one of the editors of "Pensamiento Cristiano", and director of an evangelical school of Bible study in Barcelona, has devoted much thought to the central theological subjects named in the title of this article. His treatment of them will no doubt provoke some dissent from the side of covenant theology as well as from modern dispensationalism, but it will stimulate readers in both these camps, and other readers too, to further thought on matters which are so basic in our understanding of the unity of Scripture.

THE Christians of the second century were, in the main, faithful and godly men, rich in good works, and often ready to give their lives for their faith and their Lord. Nevertheless, even a superficial reading of their literary productions—the "Shepherd of Hermas", the "Epistle of Barnabas", the "Teaching of the Twelve", for example—shows how quickly they had lost contact with the fundamental teaching of the Apostle to the Gentiles. His epistles were collected under the name of "The Apostle", and were presumably read and admired, but the "absoluteness" of grace was too much for their understanding, and, on practical grounds, it seemed necessary to present the Gospel as "the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ". In fact, grace must be "hedged round" to avoid antinomianism.¹ Speaking of even the worthy and early "Epistle of St. Clement", Professor Cave says: "St. Paul's conception of faith and grace was not really understood". A new legalism soon sprang up which enjoined fasting, good works and "going the extra mile".

It is only natural that responsible Christian leaders at all times should appreciate the practical dangers inherent in a misinterpretation of "grace abounding" which amply provides for the justification and the sanctification of the sinner on the sole condition of submission and faith, and there seems to be a mild, but significant, reaction in this direction among orthodox evangelicals in our own

¹ Sydney Cave, *The Christian Estimate of Man*, pp. 16 ff.

day, especially in Great Britain. The underlying questions seem to be the following: Will not an over-emphasis of grace and faith for the whole work of salvation (including sanctification) lead some to neglect the safeguards of diligence and perseverance in godliness? Will not some who have been taught to "let go and let God" presume to superior sanctity on the basis of a frothy "experience" and fail to maintain a serious and steady testimony? Should they not rather listen to at least some of the thunders of Sinai?

Recent re-appraisals of the function of law are all to the good so long as they correct extremes and provoke thoughtfulness and care, but the tendency of all reactions is to extremes. It is a commonplace that truths seen out of perspective tend to become untruths, and there is a real need to state Pauline doctrine in St. Paul's own words, *maintaining his contrasts and emphases*, with the confidence that the New Testament provides its own safeguards against any tendency to an "evangelical antinomianism".

The present study is prepared by a missionary, and not by a theologian, which must serve as an apology for the scarcity of quotations from authorities on the matter. Most inadequately it seeks to answer the question: Can the inter-relation of Grace, Covenant and Law be expressed in a way which does justice to the unity of divine principles throughout Scripture, and yet does not do violence to the contrasts and emphases of Scripture?

I. GRACE

Outside the writings of the New Testament the *charis* of the first century was a pleasant, but rather slight and trivial thing: gifts, benefits, gratitude, thanks and the like. Biblical usage takes mere benignity and centres it in the Throne of God, where it is seen to be the source of all His mighty acts as He reveals Himself to man and plans his redemption and glorification. It is the powerful current of divine energy which flows irresistibly forward, overcoming all opposition, guiding events towards the great consummation. It is God working, and the only possible antecedent causes to this grace are His love and His own purpose.

It would perhaps be possible to press this definition so as to include all God's dealings with man under the heading of grace. Thus the judgment which fell on Noah's contemporaries might be an act of "grace" for future generations; the thunders of Sinai were a means of forwarding a divine purpose, and so were a manifestation of "grace" and so on. But actually Scriptural usage knows nothing of this and places grace in sharp contrast with "law" and "judgment". "The law was given by Moses, *but* grace and

truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17). "By *grace* are ye *saved*" (Eph. 2: 8). "Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father which loved us and gave us *eternal comfort through grace . . .*" (2 Thess. 2: 16). "The *grace of God hath appeared bringing salvation to all men . . .*" (Titus 2: 11). "God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and *grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus* before times eternal" (2 Tim. 1: 9 f.). As far as the writer is aware, grace is always associated with the positive aspects of the plan of redemption in the New Testament. Calvin may speak of the law of Sinai as a manifestation of grace, and his expression may be echoed in evangelical circles today, but the phraseology is foreign to New Testament writers. There is obviously a substratum of truth in the unbiblical expression, but it would seem safer to hold fast to "the form of sound words" delivered to us.

II. THE UNCONDITIONAL COVENANTS OF GRACE

The older theologians made much of "covenant" or "federal" theology: "federal" in this sense being derived from Lat. *foedus*, an agreement or covenant, which depended on the *fides* or faithfulness of the contracting parties. It has always been understood, of course, that in covenants between God and man, the divine contribution is immensely more important than the human one, but the idea of mutual obligation remained (and remains), so that the *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (art. *in loc.*) declares that "[God's] covenant with man is a *free promise on His part, generally based upon the fulfilment of certain conditions by man*". The italicized phrases (our italics) shows a certain confusion of thought, for a free promise on the part of God cannot be made dependent on certain conditions to be fulfilled by man, neither generally nor in certain stated cases, though a right attitude on man's part is necessary if the free promise is to be appropriated.

In a recent opuscle, *The Covenant of Grace* (Tyndale Press), Professor John Murray, while acknowledging the value of covenant theology as a means of seeing the divine programme in perspective, has helpfully sought to rectify the mistaken emphasis on the human contribution in a covenant of grace, arriving at the conclusion that the Hebrew *berith* (translated by *διαθήκη* in the LXX) is not equivalent to a human covenant of a commercial, social, political or international character, for it means *sworn fidelity* rather than a mutual undertaking. "It is not the contractual terms that are in prominence [in these covenants between Abimelech and Isaac, Jacob and Laban, etc.], so much as the solemn engagement of one

person to another. To such an extent is this the case that stipulated terms of agreement need not be present at all. It is the giving of oneself over in the commitment of truth that is emphasized, and the specified conditions as those upon which the engagement or commitment is contingent are not mentioned. It is the promise of unreserved fidelity, of whole-souled commitment that appears to constitute the essence of the covenant" (*op. cit.*, p. 10). If this is true of an engagement between men, how much more so when *God* is He who promises! This leads Professor Murray to the conclusion that a divine covenant is essentially unilateral, unconditional and monergistic, so that the required attitude on the part of the recipient of the guarantee is not to be construed as an obligation which conditions the covenant, but "simply the reciprocal responses of faith, love and obedience, apart from which the enjoyment of the covenant blessing and of the covenant relation is inconceivable" (*op. cit.*, p. 19). In other words, in a covenant of grace God alone works, promises, guarantees and provides in His sovereignty, while the man of faith submits himself to receive the unmerited favour. Repentance and faith are not contributions, but simply the essential conditions for the reception of what is wholly God's in inception, operation and provision.

This concept is supported by the fact that the translators of the LXX, with the writers of the New Testament, had to their hand the term *συνθήκη* which exactly represents a covenant based on mutual obligation, but they deliberately chose to employ *διαθήκη* which, etymologically, is a deposit by means of which something is secured, and not a joint deposit by agreeing parties, and thus can be used for "testament" in which only the unilateral will of the testator is in evidence.

III. THE FUNDAMENTAL COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

The Noahic Covenant, which provided for the continuance of ordered human existence, is a typical example of a covenant of grace, in which man can do no more than receive what God orders and provides, but we only note this in passing as our concern is with the advancement of the plan of redemption in which the Abrahamic covenant is obviously of fundamental importance.

The God of Creation and Providence did not cease to be interested in the human race when Abram was called, as is obvious from the fact that by means of the patriarch all the families of the earth were to be blessed; but men as a whole had become blind to God's revelation in nature and deaf to the insistent appeals of the inner voice of conscience, so that a new instrument had necessar-

ily to be forged to advance the divine plan for saving and blessing a fallen race. God's voice was heard by a willing-hearted man, Abram, who learned to know and trust the one true God. He was subjected to special disciplines designed to separate him from the world and to cast himself wholly upon God (known in consequence as El Shaddai) as the only and sufficient source of supply, power and blessing. By miraculous means in the early stages a family sprang from the man, and the resulting family became a nation which was also subjected to special trials and means of discipline, and then delivered by extraordinary manifestations of divine grace and power. Thus the national "vessel" was formed which was to receive, contain and transmit the treasure of God's special revelations until the full light of the glory of God should shine in the face of Jesus Christ—Himself the "Seed" in whose Person the promises to Abraham were secured. It is in this sense that "salvation is of the Jews". The "vessel" was by no means perfect, but maybe the old vessel, like the new one of the Church's testimony, had necessarily to be "earthen" so that the "excellency of the power might be of God". In fact Israel's failures, according to the principles of Divine Providence, were converted into new opportunities for fuller revelations of God's nature and purposes.

The promise made to Abraham is first indicated in Genesis 12: 1-3, and confirmed by the covenant of chapter 15, and the "oath" of chapter 22. It is therefore the pivot upon which divine purposes of redemption were to revolve, and, gathered up by the "Seed" into the New Covenant, its fundamental characteristics became eternal. The human race was not forgotten, but must receive a delayed blessing by the special means which divine wisdom saw to be necessary. More details were to be added in succeeding revelations to the patriarch, but the essential features were plain from the beginning, and were guaranteed by God's majestic and unalterable "I will . . .".

The covenant was confirmed in the circumstances described in chapters 14 and 15. Perhaps the glimpse of the eternal priesthood "according to the order of Melchizedek" was necessary before the establishment by covenant of the special means of grace to be administered through Abraham and his seed. Such seems to be the underlying argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 7. In any case, years had passed since the promise was made, and the "son" had not yet been given. Abram, faithful, but weary of waiting, cries out: "What wilt Thou give me seeing that I go childless . . . whereby shall I know?" God's answer is the

covenant in which God's majesty condescends to the use of human custom to strengthen His servant's faith and provide an indisputable object lesson of the unilateral and unconditional character of the Abrahamic covenant. It is well known that Jer. 34: 18 f. gives us the meaning of the divided sacrifices. Contracting parties to a solemn covenant passed between them to show that their bond was unbreakable. Thus it was that when Abram saw the "smoking furnace with flames as of a torch" pass *alone* along the blood-stained pathway it assured him that God, and God alone, had entered into an endless and utter obligation on his behalf . . . "In that day *God* made a covenant with Abram . . .".

Everything here emphasizes the absolute and intangible nature of the covenant entered into by God. Abram craves his blessing and his faith enables God to put down "righteousness" to his account, but it is God Himself who reiterates and enlarges the promises and commits Himself in a most solemn covenant. This is the firm basis of Paul's teaching: "*A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect*" (Gal. 3: 15-19). The covenant of Genesis 15 (confirmed later on, by the divine "oath" of chapter 22) may be further developed on being incorporated into the New Covenant sealed by the blood of Christ, *but it cannot be annulled and must be considered as being in operation throughout the Old Testament period*, however much Sinai may loom threateningly in the foreground.

IV. THE SINAI COVENANT

We come now to the most controversial part of our study: the appraisal of the meaning of the Sinai covenant, the intricate interrelation of the Decalogue, the precepts following its promulgation, and the associated Levitical ritual. We have already noted the existence of a re-appraisal of the theme in conservative circles recently, and the danger (in our opinion) of the theological pendulum swinging over too far. "Law" as spiritual education has been stressed as it has not been for many generations. All this is to the good in a right perspective, but there is a real danger lest the Pauline antithesis between law and grace may be "ironed out", and, while secondary considerations are being placed rather violently in the foreground, fundamental matters may be relegated to the background. It would not seem that Paul, the great interpreter of law and grace, would have used phrases such as the following: "In reality there is nothing that is principally different in the necessity of keeping the covenant and of obedience to God's

voice, which proceeds from the Mosaic covenant, from that which is involved in the keeping required in the Abrahamic" (Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 22). "The Law of Sinai belongs to the covenant of grace" (E. F. Kevan, *The Evangelical Doctrine of Law*, p. 16). "When Christ bade the young ruler keep them [the Ten Commandments] if he would 'enter into life' (Mt. 19: 17), He constituted them a rule of life for all His followers" (G. T. Manley, *The New Bible Commentary*, pp. 203 f.).

These phrases may have elements of truth, but the thought and phraseology are not Pauline. And we must note that the sharp contrasts which are typical of St. Paul's treatment of the subject are *not* between grace and Jewish misconception of law, *but between grace and the law given at Sinai*. That the law in itself is necessarily good, and that it serves an educative and disciplinary purpose in the world, is, of course, common ground; but while St. Paul very occasionally notes this purpose as a secondary matter, the contrast between law and grace is essential to the whole structure of his doctrine. The law reveals the sin it is powerless to remove; the law is God's sledge-hammer with which he smashes to atoms every fragment of human self-sufficiency. The law pronounced the death sentence on the infractor of the least of its precepts. The law cannot give life, but "shuts us up unto the saving faith which was afterwards to be revealed". Christ Himself could only redeem us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us upon the tree. Hence, in the personal experience of St. Paul: "I through the law died to the law that I might live unto God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith: the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2: 19 f.). The whole of the Epistle to the Galatians, the great section of chapters 3 to 11 of Romans, the striking contrasts between the passing glory of the "old", and the abiding glory of the "new" in 2 Cor. 3; those between the "mount which burned with fire" to which we have *not* now come, and the heavenly Zion which is our sphere in Hebrews 12: all witness in emphatic and striking language to the supersession of what Sinai represented, because of its fulfilment in Christ, and declare in most unequivocal language that we are "not under law but under grace", whether it be for justification or for sanctification.

"Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to everyone that believeth", and if the "righteous requirements of the law" are not

produced by the power of the Holy Spirit on the basis of the work of Calvary for those “who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit”, it will be labour lost to return the saints to the school of the law. “Christ in you the hope of glory” is full of infinite power and if the power of sin is not broken by Him, a partial return to the whip of the law will be totally ineffective. If there is a danger of “antinomianism” it must be cured by the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” and not by reviving a feeble echo of the thunders of Sinai.

V. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOUNT (EXODUS 19-40)

Any interpretation of the significance of the Sinai covenant which does not take full account of the apostolic contrasts we have mentioned, or relegates them to a theological background, must necessarily be totally inadequate. Instead of “ironing out” vital differences which obviously exist in apostolic thinking, we must use them as the indispensable touchstone to determine what are the real factors which constitute the “continuum” of divine purposes, and note at the same time the limits of that which could “become old” and “pass away”. The essential strands are the following:

(1) The gracious Abrahamic covenant, which according to St. Paul could not be annulled, was in continuous operation until it was “taken up” into the new covenant sealed by the blood of Christ. There are certain rivers in the limestone area of Yorkshire which disappear underground for a part of their course, but surface again later on, and, of course, though they are temporarily invisible, their course is uninterrupted. Thus with the Abrahamic covenant in the course of Israel’s history after the promulgation of the Law. The godly poet who wrote Psalm 105, as he recounts the history of the people from the standpoint of divine grace, finds the basis of God’s dealings *in the Abrahamic covenant*: “He hath remembered His covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations: the covenant which he made with Abraham and his oath unto Isaac, and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a statute to Israel for an everlasting covenant . . .” This was the basic agreement: the unilateral and unconditioned engagement which God would “remember” when He saved His people from a thousand follies for which the law could only curse them (Ps. 106: 45).

Moses himself, in the process of law-giving, but faced with the rebellion of the very people who had listened to the Voice at Sinai, could only intercede by appealing back to the promises made to

Abraham (Ex. 32: 13), and a reading of Deuteronomy will show the same appeal in all moments of national failure.

When St. Paul appeals to the continuity of God’s purposes to show that “his gospel” was not a dangerous innovation, he *never* appeals to the law of Sinai, but *always* to the principles of God’s grace received in faith by godly men in the Old Testament (David, Habakkuk and the like), and these stem, not from Mount Sinai, but from the Plains of Mamre. St. Peter links his offer of the Risen Messiah to the same stream of grace: “The God of *Abraham*, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his servant Jesus . . .” “Ye are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your father, saying unto *Abraham*: ‘and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed’” (Acts 3: 13, 25).

(2) The next strand is the law of Sinai, designed, according to the Apostle, to reveal the true nature of sin. It “came in alongside” according to Rom. 5: 20 (νόμος δὲ παρείσθησθαι), or, in the language of Gal. 3: 19, it was “added” to show that sin was a transgression of divine standards, “till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made”.

Grace had been characteristically manifested in the great event of the Exodus and the early journeys in the wilderness on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant, which made it possible for God to bear His people on eagles’ wings and bring them to Himself. An attitude of humble endeavour to please the Lord, who had redeemed them from Egypt despite their manifold failings and rebellions, would have opened the door to further blessings by which Israel would be a “peculiar treasure” and a “kingdom of priests”. The fact that the testing of Israel under the law was a necessity to the divine plan does not destroy the significance of the carnal pride of Israel in their solemn undertaking: “All that the Lord hath spoken will we do”; no more does it turn a means of discipline into a “manifestation of grace” in the sense in which “grace” is used in Scripture. Their undertaking was a part of their secular striving to “establish their own righteousness”, because they failed to understand the full sense of the “righteousness of God” (Rom. 10: 3) and their declaration marks the transition from God’s gracious words of comfort to the “intolerable words” amid the awe-inspiring circumstances which the writer to the Hebrews found so significant as a contrast to the true Zion. If St. Paul’s argument in Gal. 3 has any meaning at all, there must have been *some* moment in which the law appeared to act as

“jailor” and *paidagogos* in contrast to the abiding assurances of the Abrahamic covenant, and we may do well to be humble enough to acknowledge that the older theologians were probably right when they discerned that moment in Ex. 19: 8 f.

In a theological interlude in *The Books and the Parchments* (pp. 75 f.), Professor F. F. Bruce states the essence of the matter thus:¹

Why was a new covenant necessary? Why did not the Mosaic Covenant remain in force? Because the Mosaic Covenant was defective. It was an undertaking solemnly entered into by Jehovah and Israel; its continued validity depended on both sides honouring their agreement. There was no doubt about this on Jehovah's side, of course; but what about the people's? They intended to keep the covenant, it is true. When they listened to Moses reading the divine law, 'the book of the covenant', they said: 'All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient' (Ex. 24: 7). But, when put to the test, they found it difficult, and indeed impossible, to keep their agreement. There lay the defect. But although the people of Israel failed to keep their side of the covenant, the God of Israel continued to keep His.

The fact is that God promised nothing conditionally at Sinai that He had not already guaranteed unconditionally to Abraham. St. Paul pinpoints the essential principle of the Law Covenant in Galatians 3: “Do . . . be blessed . . . live”; “disobey . . . be under the curse . . . die”. Yet to Abraham he had said: “By Myself I have sworn that blessing I will bless thee . . . I will multiply thy seed . . . thy seed shall possess the gates of their enemies . . . in thy seed shall all the people of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22: 16-18).

We may add St. Peter's inspired comment: “Why tempt ye God, that ye should put a *yoke* upon the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” The “yoke” was a necessary temporal discipline, but now: “With freedom did Christ set us free; stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage”. The Spirit powerfully “desires” against the flesh, despite the latter's contrary strivings, and godly living will be seen

¹ [The author of *The Books and the Parchments* takes leave to mention that he does not regard the Israelites' undertaking in Ex. 19: 8; 24: 3, 7, as necessarily an expression of “carnal pride”. When God told them of the blessings which would be theirs if they obeyed His voice and kept His covenant, and later gave them in more detail the terms of His covenant, what other answer could have been expected from them than an engagement to render exclusive devotion and obedience to the God who had redeemed them from Egypt and called them to be a people for His own possession? Their undertaking is rather the expression of a good intention which the event proved them unable to carry out in their own strength.]

in those who, living by grace “in the Spirit”, also “walk in the Spirit”. (See the whole argument of Gal. 5: 16-26.) According to St. Peter “diligence” in holy living is stimulated by “the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord, seeing that *His divine power hath granted us all things that pertain unto life and godliness*” (2 Pet. 1: 2-8).

The meaning of *berith* or διαθήκη given above must suffer a certain modification in the case of Sinai in view of the preceding paragraphs, but it should be noted that the apparent human contribution in the Sinai covenant was never effective, and was demanded only to show the impossibility of such a contribution, while the “gracious” elements of the Abrahamic *berith*, and the provisions of the Levitical régime, continued to make good the essence of an unconditioned and monergistic covenant.

(3) *The Levitical Ritual*. In our view those nineteenth-century theologians were wholly right who regarded the Levitical ritual as a symbolic “covering”, speaking of the eternal work of the Cross, which made it possible for God to declare of Himself through Balaam: “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel”. The terrible lesson of the *paidagogos* was accompanied by a series of object-lessons, which, according to Hebrews, spoke of “good things to come”, and without which the rod of the *paidagogos* would have at once become an exterminating sword.

The order of presentation in Exodus is significant: first the Decalogue, and some basic ordinances were given. As soon as they were given, Moses ordered the offering of sacrifices and sprinkled the blood upon the people, which was a rough and ready anticipation of the complicated ritual soon to be given, and spoke of the “blood of the covenant” (Ex. 24: 4-8, with the significant commentary of the writer to the Hebrews on this scene in Heb. 9: 19-22). Then the plan of the Tabernacle was given to Moses in the mount. By this time the people had committed the sin of the golden calf by which they had broken their “covenant” and placed themselves under the wrath of God, and therefore Moses broke the first tables of the law in pieces at the foot of the mount. Partial judgment follows, with Moses' intercession on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant. Then the Tabernacle was set up and the Levitical system instituted in detail, with the new tables of the law hidden in the Ark of the Covenant. *The lesson is that even a partial application of the covenant of works was inconceivable apart from a ritual which spoke continually of the value of the*

expiatory work of Christ, basis of the Eternal Covenant, which was to be manifested in "the consummation of the ages" (Heb. 9: 26).

The whole of Hebrews is a commentary on this principle, but the key verse is found in Heb. 7: 11: "For on *the basis of it* (the Levitical priesthood) hath the people received the law" (ὁ λαὸς γὰρ ἐπὶ αὐτῆς νενομοθετήται). That is to say, the Levitical system was not a strange appendage to the Decalogue, judgments and ordinances, but the very basis which made possible their promulgation.

Our conclusion is, therefore, that the "gracious" elements of God's dealings with Israel from Sinai to the Cross stem entirely from the Abrahamic covenant, which in itself was to be fulfilled in Christ, while the Levitical sacrifices kept constantly in view the righteous basis on which God could bless His people. On the other hand, any attempt to find a direct manifestation of the grace of God in the thunders of Sinai tends to undermine some of the fundamental postulates of Pauline theology.

VI. THE ISRAELITE UNDER THE LAW

The problem of the individual Israelite under the law is an interesting one. Without any doubt the spiritual leaders of the people, and especially the prophets, insisted that the Israelite must "obey", and St. Paul gives the clear sense of Deut. 27: 26, and 28: 15 when he declares that those who do not fulfil *all* the precepts are under the curse. Jeremiah was equally emphatic in his day (Jer. 11: 3-4). Was there not something quite unreal, and even hypocritical and unfair, in commanding people to keep commandments quite beyond their moral capacity, and threaten them with fearful sanctions if they failed to do so? We have seen that the general work of the law consisted in revealing sin and breaking down human self-sufficiency, but what of the poor individual who was struggling to do his best until the time came for the heavy yoke to be taken from his neck?

Thinking first of the humble-hearted Israelite who sincerely desired to know and do God's will, there is abundant evidence in the Old Testament to show that, while he sought to obey the precepts, he realized at the same time his own unworthiness and sin, and was thrown upon the mercy of God. In the individual case, therefore, the law did its real work and humbled the sinner before God. The Psalms, which give an insight into the inner experiences of men of God under the law, show us what the process was: sin was recognized and confessed, as in Psalm 51, and, by the help

of the Levitical symbolism, it was understood that the Lord had provided a "cover" for sin in the case of His humble and faithful servants: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Ps. 32: 1-2). The understanding might be dim, but it was real; the logic of righteousness might not have been clearly discerned, but spiritual perception was active, and the Law was doing its true *paidagogos* work of spiritual discipline in order that faithful men might throw themselves upon the Lord.

It is to the inspired declarations of such men that St. Paul appeals in order to establish the inner spiritual continuity between God's workings in the Old Testament and His clear revelation of "justification by faith" under the New Pact. He does not say that Law was a part of the Covenant of Grace, but gathers up the experience of Abraham, David and Habakkuk, etc., in order to show that godly men were saved by the grace revealed in the covenant with Abraham and symbolized in the offerings, all of which they discerned and received by faith, even before the Cross had shown the righteous basis of God's forgiveness of sins in their case (Rom. 3: 25 f.).

In the case of the proud and self-sufficient Israelite, who, according to the analysis of Rom. 10: 3, sought to establish his own righteousness because he could not perceive the inner nature of the righteousness of God, the law had a directly contrary effect. Such a man had never been spiritually "on the mount" in order to glimpse the ineffable glory of God and the burning brightness of His holiness, nor had he exclaimed with Isaiah: "Woe is me, I am undone . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts". Because of the lack of this basic experience, the Law for him was nothing more than a series of external precepts, within the reach of his own efforts. The attitude of the rich ruler is typical: "All these things have I observed from my youth". Pride of heart hindered the law from doing its great work of revealing the inner corruption of man's heart, and the protective psychological screen which had necessarily to be raised round the depths of the legalist's real nature gave rise to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, which, as the Master saw it, was the dominant evil in the Israel of His day. In the case of the rich ruler and of the lawyer of Luke 10, he uses the lancet of the law to open up the inner abscess of corruption, as also when he insists on absolute love to God and man as being the essence of the law.

The legalist also inverted the teaching of the Levitical sacrifices, for, instead of understanding with the spiritual "Abels" that, al-

though he should die for his sins, God had made a mysterious provision for vicarious expiation, he saw himself as the important "donor" who brought *his* offering to God, who should be pleased with the sacrifice that he, the generous offerer, had made. What was intended to be a humbling experience and a symbol of hope in the mercy of God was thus turned into a motive of pride and self-esteem. It was *this* attitude to the sacrifices which moved the prophets to insist that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams": a spiritual maxim which must in no wise be interpreted to mean that God had made a mistake in giving Israel the "object-lesson" of the Levitical order!

The law, then, acted as a touchstone to discern the intents of the heart, separating the humble-minded seekers after God from the proud and self-sufficient. This is in the sphere of religion. Its condemnatory action over against materialistic hardness of heart is obvious.

VII. THE NEW COVENANT

The *locus classicus* is Jeremiah 31: 31 ff., extensively quoted and commented on in Heb. 8. The essential thoughts are a complete change from the "old" to the "new" because of the failure of Israel. The "old" sought to act from the outside, seeking to induce obedience by alternating promises and threatenings, but the "new" (καινός, new in kind, in contrast with the παλαιός, old and decaying) was to be based on a law written in the minds and hearts of the people, and this "inward-outward" process would be so successful that there would be no further need for exhortations to "know the LORD". Obviously the blessings prophesied for the people in a future age depended on a work of grace, and anticipated the regeneration of the heart which springs only from the work of the Cross and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This the Master made clear when He instituted the Lord's Supper. His blood was the "blood of the New Covenant", as the blood of the animal sacrifices in the Levitical order was the "blood of the covenant" then manifested, guaranteeing its limited and typical provisions. His was the *life* of infinite worth which was "given" on the altar of the Cross "to make atonement" for the forfeited life of the sinner (Lev. 17: 11).¹ Here we get to the eternal basis of the unconditioned promises made to Abraham and see the real meaning of the "shedding of blood" in the Levitical order. Here too the sinner, bowed to the dust by the force of the

¹ See A. M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word "Blood" in Scripture* (Tyndale Press).

law, may see the One who is "the end of the law unto righteousness".

It is interesting to note that the best MSS. of Matt. 26: 28 and Mark 14: 20 omit the adjective "new" and speak only of "*my blood of the covenant*", though "new covenant" is found in Luke 22: 20. The fact that the adjective could possibly be omitted underlines the unity of the Eternal Covenant, adumbrated in the guarantees given to Abraham, while the use of "new" marks the contrast between Calvary and Sinai.

According to Heb. 13: 20 "the great Shepherd of the sheep" was brought again from the dead by "the blood of the eternal covenant": a pregnant statement which links the sacrifice back to the divine plan, perfected before the worlds were, and guarantees the absolute permanence of the new creation inaugurated by the resurrection of our Lord. The work of the Cross spans the ages and affects the whole cosmos. Only by the surpassing virtue of the blood of the everlasting covenant is it possible to raise the walls and palaces of that "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God".

VIII. THE FULFILMENT OF THE LAW

Although the law "was weak through the flesh", the commandment was nevertheless "holy, just and good", and our Lord teaches us that not one jot or tittle of it must pass away. If the legal system became so absolutely ineffective and "obsolete", in what sense is the law fulfilled?

(1) *In the Person and work of Christ.* "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and, as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8: 3). The sin which the law condemned received its final sentence in the "offering" of Calvary. He who had honoured the law by a perfect obedience to the will of God in His own life, honoured it for us sinners, when He vicariously exhausted its sentence against us.

(2) *In the manifestation of its spiritual content* which raised it infinitely above a mere code of external ordinances. The tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet", had shown that God condemns even movements of the human desires, which earthly tribunals could by no means note or punish. In the "Sermon on the Mount" our Lord gives the same spiritual content to other commandments, and, by implication, to them all. The law was broken by the desire and intent to break it. The Sermon on the Mount, the "ethical code" of popular Christianity, is therefore infinitely

more terrible to sinners than the Ten Words from the flaming mountain. Thus the Master “filled full” the imperfect external requirements of the Decalogue, and gave us a “spiritual law” from a mountain in Galilee. It was this which brought St. Paul to his knees. “Without the law” (understood in its spiritual essence) he had once “lived”, thinking that, as regards the righteousness which was in the law he was “blameless”. But when the keen edge of the spiritual law pierced him, he “died” (Rom. 7: 4-14; Phil. 3: 6). Every jot and tittle of this spiritual law must stand for it is nothing more or less than the expression of the holiness of God.

(3) *The Law of Love* (Deut. 6: 5; Matt. 22: 36-40; Luke 10: 25-29). This is the great link between the “old” and the “new”. All the exhortations of the Law and the Prophets could be resumed in total love to God and one’s neighbours, but as a mere *command* it is totally inaccessible to fallen human nature, and after its rehearsal and the exhortation: “*This do*, and thou shalt live”, the lawyer of Luke 10 stood condemned by obvious disobedience, and sought (vainly) to “justify himself” by a legal parry. Paul’s use of the great “summary” in Gal. 5: 14 and Rom. 13: 8-10 (in regard to one’s neighbour) is linked with his teaching that ἀγάπη is the fundamental “fruit of the Spirit” so that what is required of the believer in the basic command of the New Order, “Love one another”, is first produced in him on the ground of what God has *done* once and for all in the Cross and the Resurrection.

(4) *The righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in the lives of spiritual Christians*. Following the great declaration of the work of Christ which we have already noticed in Rom. 8: 3, the Apostle goes on to say: “that the requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit”. The Holy Spirit produces a nine-fold fruit in the lives of humble and obedient Christians, “and against such there is no law”, for the fruit of the Spirit is itself the fulfilment of the law of love to God and to our neighbour (Gal. 5: 22-24).

“I do not make void the grace of God”, declares St. Paul, after stating that he was “dead” to the law and lived only by his faith in the Son of God, “for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nought”. The law of “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” is set in perfect contrast to the old, and cannot be identified with it. The norms of the new creation, which sprang from Calvary, were vitalized by the Resurrection and the descent of the

Holy Spirit, and do not need legal props of any description to make them effective.

The didactic work of the law in our day is summed up by Paul in 2 Tim. 1: 5-11: “Now the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart [a work of the Holy Spirit on the basis of the Cross] . . . from which some have turned aside . . . desiring to be teachers of the law. . . . But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully. Knowing this, *that the law is not made for the righteous man, but for the lawless, the disobedient, the ungodly, etc.*”

IX. CONCLUSION

(1) There is a necessary unity in God’s purposes and operations, and His Covenant of Grace with regard to man is “eternal”, being founded on the sacrifice of the “Lamb”, “foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but . . . manifested at the end of the times for your sake” (1 Pet. 1: 20; Heb. 13: 20; Rev. 13: 8).

(2) The Abrahamic covenant was a manifestation in time of the Eternal Covenant, and as such was purely of grace, unconditional, and guaranteed by God alone. It was, so to speak, an “instalment” of *the Covenant* to be sealed by the blood of Christ.

(3) The term *grace* in Scripture is used only of the manifestations of God’s favour in relation with His eternal redemptive plan “in Christ”. God’s “strange work”—made necessary by the Fall—which consists in the manifestation, condemnation and judgment of sin, is not called a work of grace in Scripture. Grace is supremely shown in the vicarious sufferings of Christ on the Cross for the removal of sin. In Pauline expression, *law* and *grace* are strongly contrasted, as is also the legal régime and the New Covenant. The same contrast is seen as a basic argument in Hebrews.

(4) The revelation of God’s holiness and of His righteous demands at Sinai was a necessary means of establishing sin as “transgression”, and of breaking down all human self-righteousness, but the law had no power to deal with the evil it revealed, and so was a “ministry of death”. It “came in alongside” the Abrahamic covenant to fulfil this disciplinary purpose, and did not abrogate the former covenant to which godly and contrite Israelites constantly appealed.

(5) The “covenant” associated with the giving of the Law was entirely “special”, since its conditions were never kept on the human side, and it could only be seen, even in partial operation, because of the symbolic “provisions of grace” in the Levitical ré-

gime of sacrifice, upon which it was based. It is a *berith* only as linked with these provisions.

(6) The (mainly) external law of Sinai was given full spiritual meaning by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, for, as He taught, it is the "intent to sin" which is judged, and not only the overt act.

(7) When our Lord instituted the Last Supper He declared that the Eternal Covenant of Grace was established "in His blood". The Eternal Covenant was now to be revealed and the Abrahamic covenant confirmed and completed in the promised "Seed". This covenant was "new" only in contrast with the obsolete "covenant of works".

(8) In the Pauline corpus the use of the law as a means of producing a knowledge of sin, and thus "leading" men to grace is emphasized again and again. It is contrary to the Apostle's teaching to think that "saints" who are "in Christ" and indwelt by the Holy Spirit need the "whip of the law" to help them to holy living. (See Rom. 7: 1-6.) The new "law of the spirit of life in Christ"—a matter of inward and positive power—is alone appealed to in this respect. Over against the antinomian question of Rom. 6: 1 St. Paul places the position of the believer as one who "died" and "rose again" in identity with Christ, and does not appeal to the law. In fact the believer may triumph over sin precisely because he is "not under the law but under grace" (Rom. 6: 14).

(9) At the same time all "instruction in righteousness", from all parts of the Scriptures, is valuable and important, and the law is useful in dealing with open and blatant types of sin among ungodly men (1 Tim. 1: 9-10; 2 Tim. 3: 15-17). But these matters are incidental and secondary, while the contrast between law and grace is fundamental to Pauline doctrine.

(10) Exaggerated dispensationalism is harmful when it conceals the fundamental unity of God's principles as He deals with men in all ages, but there are "times and seasons" clearly noted in Scripture and which correspond to the different ways in which God reveals Himself to men after the "black-out" of the Fall.

(11) The Abrahamic covenant, confirmed by God's "oath", must be fulfilled in all its parts.

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