

Sabbath School Lesson #2 – The Controversy – 7-13 October 2017

Christ would have us accept His grace for salvation. Thus, John says, “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus” (John 1:17). Note, although this quarter is titled “Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans” this week’s Lesson is not from Romans, it is from other books including Galatians 1, revisiting “the controversy” over circumcision in Acts 15.

We focus here on the memory text: the statement that the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. This does not mean there is a contrast between the law and the truth, for the law is the truth, as we read, “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy law is the truth” (Psalm 119:142). The contrast is between the power of Moses, and that of Christ. The contrast is the same that would be between Christ and any other man than Moses. The greatest man that ever lived is only a man, while Christ is Divine, having life in Himself (John 5:26).

Neither Moses nor any other man can put truth in the hearts of men. The righteousness of God is that which we are exhorted to seek (Matthew 6:33), and that is expressed in the law of God (Isaiah 51:5-7). Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Men may preach, but He alone can put the righteousness and truth of God into the hearts and lives of men. The law was given by Moses; but although the law is righteousness and truth, no man ever yet obtained righteousness and truth from the law. All the law can do is to tell us what we ought to do; but it does not work out its own requirements for us, and in us. It is a grand thing to declare the law to men; it is a most wonderful thing to be used as a speaker for God, to declare His word faithfully; but the best man who ever lived could not save a single soul. “But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Remember that the law is the truth (Psalm 119:142). The law comes by Christ, but it comes with grace. He says that the law is in His heart (Psalm 40:7-8), so when He dwells in the heart by faith (Ephesians 3:17), the law is necessarily there; and thus the truth is in the inward parts, as the Lord desires. Moreover since in Him is life, it is manifest that when the law comes into us in Christ, it is life to us. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

Christ is the declaration of God. The exhortation to us is, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). God says, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” But no man hath seen God at any time, and therefore how can we know how to be holy as He is holy? – “The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” Christ *is* in the bosom of the Father; that is His home. He is the express image of God (Hebrews 1:3). All the attributes of God are His, “For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). “And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” That is, in Christ all the fulness of God is conveyed to us (Ephesians 3:17-19), and consequently all the righteousness of God.

Now it is evident that no man, however good, could do this for us, because in the first place no man can have any goodness except what is necessary for himself, and, in the second place, no man can live in another. No man can live another’s life for him. Only Christ, who gave Himself for us, and who is able to live in us, can bring into our lives the righteousness of God, making His life our own. And now comes the most important question: when did grace and truth come by Jesus Christ? At what particular time in the history of the world does Christ bring the righteousness of the law into the hearts of believers? Is it only since His first advent, and His resurrection? Did God lay upon men before Christ came, the burden of getting righteousness out of the law by their own efforts, and only since the crucifixion give to men the blessing of righteousness through Christ? What saith the Scripture? The first chapter of John is sufficient to settle the matter for us.

“In the beginning was the Word, ... The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth ... And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:1-18). *Who* is the word? – Christ is the Word. *When* was the Word? – “In the beginning was the Word.” How far back does that reach? – “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, and yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth hath been from of old, *from the days of eternity*” (Micah 5:2). Where is Christ always? – He “is in the bosom of the Father.” What always dwells in Him? – He is always “full of grace and truth.” The law is ever in His heart. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8). What is the answer, when did grace and truth come by Christ? – Simply this, that there has never been a time since the existence of man, when the righteousness of the law could not be fulfilled in everyone who would allow Christ to dwell in his heart by faith.

But let us particularise this further. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, said of Moses, "This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the Angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers; who received the lively oracles given unto us" (Acts 7:38). The Angel that spoke to Moses in the mount Sinai was the Angel in whom is the Name of God (Exodus 23:20-23), even the Lord Jesus Christ. That Angel was to go before the children of Israel, and lead them into the promised land; and we read that "they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed [went with] them; and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). And the law was ordained by angels, "in the hand of a Mediator" (Galatians 3:19), and there is but one "Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Hence, Christ was in Mount Sinai, and gave the law to Moses, to give to the people.

"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:20-21). The law could only make sin to appear "exceeding sinful" (Romans 7:13). For "by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). The giving of the law could only make prominent the sins which already existed by the law. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56). The law makes sin to abound, not because the law is sin, but it is the declaration of perfect righteousness.

Let us study this further by questions and answers. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Where does sin abound? – where the law is. Where was the law? – it was most emphatically at Sinai. Then when was sin made to abound? – most certainly at Sinai. But what super-abounds wherever sin abounds? – "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Then what was in infinite abundance at Sinai? – the grace of God, which is by Jesus Christ. And what does grace do? – "by grace are ye saved" (Ephesians 2:8). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7). So we find that in the very giving of the law, by which is the knowledge of sin, the grace of God which brings salvation from sin, was abundantly present. For Christ was there, the giver of the law to Moses, and He is always full of grace; grace and truth come by Jesus Christ.

Very forcible are the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians concerning this matter. He says that God has made us sufficient to be ministers of the new covenant; not of letter, but of Spirit; for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life (2 Corinthians 3:6). Men are associated with Christ in the work of salvation. "As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God. God does the work, the apostle says of his desire to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily" (Colossians 1:29). In 2 Corinthians 3, we find the apostle making a contrast between the ministration of death and the ministration of life; the ministration of the condemnation, and the ministration of the righteousness. The law was death, and so it is still to every sinner. Moses ministered only the law to the people – the ministry of death. Yet it was with glory, for as he talked to the people the skin of his face shone so that they could not bear to look upon it (2 Corinthians 3:7; Exodus 34:29-35). The ministration of the righteousness was there also, for Christ was there in His glory, with grace "according to the riches of His glory."

The law was ordained "in the hand of a Mediator," namely, Christ, the "one Mediator between God and men." What does that signify? – simply that although the law in itself is death to any man, God did not leave men to deal with it alone. He did not give the law to them by Moses, simply, leaving them to meet it face to face in their own strength; He gave it to them in Christ, in whom it is life, if they would but receive Him. Christ receives the curse of the law against Himself, and passes the blessing of it along to all who believe in Him. He takes the death sting from it, so that in Him it becomes "the law of the Spirit of life." The law is in the heart of Christ. Out of the heart are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). Therefore the life of Christ is the law of God. It is not a substitute for the law of God, but it is the very law of God. His life on earth was the manifestation of the law as life; it was a specimen of the life which He will live in every one who will receive Him. He does not change. He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Therefore His life to-day is the same that it was many hundreds of years ago. Looking to Sinai we see a statement of the law of which Christ is the Mediator; looking to Judea we see the same law in action; and looking to Calvary we see the life flowing for us, by means of which the law may dwell in us. He is the Mediator of the new covenant, to write the law in the hearts of men; for He dwells in the heart by His Spirit, and thus becomes the Medium through whom the righteousness of the law is wrought out in men.