

Are We Preaching “Another” Gospel: A 31-Day Journey toward Rediscovering the Gospel of the Grace of God

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Day 16

ALL LAW

Let us consider other examples of how the New Covenant has been poured into the Old. I’m not exclusively speaking now of the moral law, but the very law *system* itself. For example, under the law, blessings were promised to those who kept the law—completely.

Deuteronomy 28:1-2

*“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully **all** His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God.*

Under the New Covenant, we are blessed because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross and not because we keep commandments.

Ephesians 1:3

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **has** blessed us with **every** spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*

2 Peter 1:1-4

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

*² Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, ³ as His divine power **has given** to us **all** things that pertain to life **and** godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.*

The Old Covenant pronounced curses upon those who did not diligently keep ALL of the law.

Deuteronomy 28:15

*“But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully **all** His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come*

upon you and overtake you.

But praise God, with the New we are free from the curse of the law, and our sins and lawless deeds are remembered no more.

Galatians 3:13-14

*Christ has **redeemed** us from the curse of the law, having become a curse **for** us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), ¹⁴ that the **blessing** of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Jeremiah 31:34

*"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember **no more.**"*

Romans 4:8

*Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall **not** impute sin.*

This system of being blessed for doing what is right and cursed for not doing what is commanded is an obvious message of many Sunday sermons. For example, how many times have we heard these blessings and curses quoted to motivate believers to give?

Malachi 3:8-10

"Will a man rob God?

Yet you have robbed Me!

But you say,

'In what way have we robbed You?'

In tithes and offerings.

⁹ ***You are cursed with a curse,***

For you have robbed Me,

Even this whole nation.

¹⁰ *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse,*

That there may be food in My house,

And try Me now in this,"

Says the Lord of hosts,

"If I will not open for you the windows of heaven

And pour out for you such blessing

That there will not be room enough to receive it.

Are believers under this curse? Absolutely not! We are under no curse at all, and most specifically when it relates to keeping the law of Moses. Jesus became a curse for us. Yet, it is being taught by some today that one of the reasons believers face difficulties, such as poverty and sickness, is because they aren't tithing and giving offerings. Imagine telling someone

who has just lost his job that this wouldn't have happened if he had been giving ten percent, or telling a sick or homeless woman that in order to be healed or to prosper, she must begin tithing! I'm not making this up. I have read this in books, heard it in sermons, and have listened to the pain of those who have been told that the reason their life is such a mess is because they are not tithing.

This is what the law system does: it causes us to link every event in our lives to whether or not we have been following it well enough.

Paul had something very different to say to the Galatians, who were being taught that they needed to add law to grace.

Galatians 3:5

Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—

Beloved, we actually taught and were instructed that in order for miracles to break out, we had to live holy lives, fast, pray, attend church, give, and on and on and on! Yet, what does Paul ask the Galatians, and what is the rhetorical response? No! The Holy Spirit is ours by faith. The working of miracles is by faith. They do not come by keeping the law or our religious effort, or our personal holiness.

Acts 3:11-12

*Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. ¹² So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? **Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?***

If we can understand this, the miracles for which we are so diligently working to see, will simply happen. Peter made it very clear. It's not because of our personal godliness. It's not because of our own power or effort. It is by grace through faith! **We can't earn miracles.**

Acts 3:16

And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Some of us will readily agree that miracles can't be gained through our own godliness or power. Most concur that as believers in Jesus Christ, we are not under any curse. Yet many Christians today cling to the other side of the equation of the law—that we are blessed *if* we do what is right. We tend to believe that God will “open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing” we cannot contain *if* we will tithe and give offerings—if we will pray and read the Bible—if we will fast—if we will live uprightly—if we, if we, if we.

Friends, allow me to declare with exceeding great joy that the windows of heaven are already open to us under the New Covenant, and His blessings are poured out upon us even if we don't deserve them! That's what grace is—**undeserved** favor from God. He has placed us in His kingdom. He has made us His righteousness. These blessings of the kingdom are based on what *Jesus* did, not as a result of what *we* do. They are based on His power working within us.

Ephesians 3:20

*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, **according to the power that works in us**,²¹ to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Under the New Covenant, who can boast? Only Jesus receives the glory for the blessings we enjoy. We no longer live under the law system of being blessed for obeying law and cursed for not obeying law. Jesus became a curse for us to redeem us from the curse of the law. We now live under the New Covenant of grace, which causes us to *receive* what *He* has done *for* us *apart* from keeping the law.

Galatians 3:11-14

*But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.”¹² Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who **does** them shall live by them.”¹³ **Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law**, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”),¹⁴ that the **blessing** of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Now, before some of you begin to draw that curtain I mentioned earlier, please consider my points. Why do we go on insisting that New Covenant believers are under *certain* parts of the law? Yes, the *Jews* were definitely cursed for not tithing. Tithes and offerings were *required* under the Old Covenant law. They *had* robbed God. They *were* cursed with a curse because they were not obeying the law, but beloved, we are under no such

curse because we are not under the law, not any part of it.

Even if we continue insisting that we are still under the moral law, certainly we must acknowledge that tithing was part of the *ceremonial* law, which most agree we aren't under.

Yes, it's true, Jesus did tell the *Jewish* audience *who were under the law* that they "did well" to tithe their mint and rue. Are Christians required to tithe mint and rue? If we are, then I surely hope all of you who garden are putting aside ten percent of what you produce—exactly ten percent, and giving it to your pastor. Count those fruit and vegetables and make sure you don't go under ten percent, or you will be cursed—that is, if you believe you are blessed and cursed for tithing *everything*.

Dear God, help us to understand the importance of this.

Some argue that since tithing took place before the law, the practice of tithing supersedes the law and thus sets an example for us. They will point to the tithe that Abraham gave to Melchizedek as their "proof". Yet Abraham tithed only one time to Melchizedek and not from his *personal* possessions but only from the spoils of war. Additionally, he did this not as a requirement or by divine instruction, but from his heart. The true lesson regarding Melchizedek in Hebrews is not that we should tithe today, but rather about the need for another priesthood apart from the Levitical priesthood—One from the tribe of Judah!

It is also important to consider that in every instance of tithing before the law, the desire and determination to do so came from the heart of the giver and not as a request or requirement or even as a divine revelation from God. Furthermore, we cannot use "the law of first mention" to argue that because people tithed before the law, it is something we should do unless we are also going to practice other things that were performed before the law, such as animal sacrifice and circumcision. Let us be consistent. If we are to follow this logic all the way through, some of us will need to circumcise our sons and build a stone altar in the backyard for sacrifices.¹

Why is the supposed requirement to tithe or the promise of a blessing for tithing *never* mentioned, not even once in Matthew through Revelation? If tithing is imperative, especially to the extent that many teach—that we are cursed for not tithing, why didn't God make this clearer to us?

Why don't we have at least one record of a request from Jesus that his

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Do you find this bizarre? Our friend from Nigeria tells us that her "Christian" church there does perform animal sacrifices! In fact, she was shunned for asking what this practice accomplished and spent many years thinking she had committed "the unpardonable sin" for doubting.

followers give ten percent? There He was—the King of kings and Lord of lords. We don't even have a record of anyone giving Him a tithe while He walked the earth. Why didn't He say, "Blessed are those who tithe, for the windows of heaven shall open to them,"? The way I've heard this preached in the past, it would seem one of the most ungodly things ever, not to give ten percent. Why didn't the Jerusalem council tell the Gentiles to avoid meat offered to idols, fornication, and to be sure to tithe? Why didn't Paul teach tithing when he taught on giving? He could have made it succinctly clear when he spoke of the oxen treading the corn in 1 Corinthians 9. Or he might have pointed it out in 2 Corinthians 8-9, for example. He could have quoted Malachi just as he so often quoted other Old Testament Scripture to make a point. It's not mentioned by *any* of the New Testament writers. Of all the correction in the book of Revelation, there is none about not tithing; not even about a lack of giving. What does Paul say instead?

2 Corinthians 9:7

*So let each one give as **he** purposes in **his** heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

We don't give because we have to, and we aren't to give against our wills. We give as we purpose in our hearts, not an amount determined by God,² because God loves a cheerful giver. Remember, God is looking at the heart, not the amount. He loves the cheerfulness with which we give.³

Jesus spoke of such a giving that doesn't keep an account.

Matthew 6:1-4

"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.² Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.³ But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,⁴ that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your

² This is not to say that God never puts an amount on our hearts. He may well tell us to help someone or give a certain amount, but even so, this is from our willing and cheerful hearts.

³ I've also heard it taught that under the New Covenant that we give **all** (not a *mere* ten percent) as it appears the Early Church did by selling lands and supplying the needs of those who lacked, but this cannot be substantiated, and the person teaching this isn't performing such a thing either but usually only seeking to make his audience "settle" for ten percent instead of "all" when neither one is required.

Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”

I remember as a young believer wondering how this verse could be true if we had to make a calculation of ten percent before giving. Surely, my right hand would know what my left was doing. Can we imagine giving with such abandon that we don't even really know how much we gave?

Believers don't need to worry about blessings and curses, for we cannot be cursed, and we are already blessed. We can give freely because we have the peace that God will supply all of our needs.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

*But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And **God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.***

Philippians 4:10, 14-19

*But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity... ¹⁴ Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. ¹⁵ Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, **no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.** ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. ¹⁸ Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things I sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. ¹⁹ **And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.***

Let me say this another way. Just as I have shown that not being under the law but under grace gives us freedom from sin's dominion instead of giving us freedom to sin, so it is that not being under the law of tithing but under grace sets us free to give abundantly—often far beyond ten percent as we see took place in the Early Church.

Now, tithing is only one example of how we add law to grace. Allow me to share a few more so that you may begin to see with increasing clarity what Paul was talking about when he warned not to receive “another” gospel.

Paul not only spoke of the law of Moses, but of law in general. I'm not referring to the laws of our society, for Paul teaches us to obey these authorities in Romans 13. Paul is discussing any law that is added to faith,

religious laws, “for if righteousness comes through law, then Christ died in vain.”

The time has come to recognize that most of our teachings are usually laced with law and that most of the misery Christians experience in life is due to some law that is lurking in their minds.

No one had to tell me to pray when I returned to faith in Jesus as a young adult. I was praying “without ceasing”. Reading the word of God was an adventure and joy. I rejoiced in learning that the God who made everything loved me. The first thing I wanted to do after confessing Jesus was find fellowship. Before a week had ended, I was in church, and attending with my fellow believers became my favorite pastime. Getting involved in ministry was all I wanted from life. Loving God and pleasing God was my constant aim. Rising up within me was this keen desire to love my brothers and sisters. Giving was a joy! Sin was falling from my life, right and left. Evil thoughts and desires were disappearing as I recognized daily how deeply I was loved. Every part of my life was being changed, even the words that came out of my mouth, the thoughts that came to my mind, and the types of activities in which I participated. Anyone who was brave enough to speak to me in those days got to hear of the glorious things God was doing in my life. I couldn’t help but share His amazing grace. I remember thinking that the worthless things that I valued in my life before Christ were nothing compared to what He was giving to me, and I hadn’t given them up in order to receive from God, but I gave them up because His love was daily overwhelming me.

None of these things happened as a result of any sermon I heard. God’s grace was teaching me to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts”, to “live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age”, and to “love one another as I have loved you”. His grace. His amazing grace! Not law.

As ministers, we observe the enthusiasm of new believers and perhaps wonder how it is that this passion so often dwindles over time. **I’ve come to see that we, the church, are teaching it out of them by adding laws and disciplines to grace, which eventually results in setting grace aside.**

God wants us to be motivated by grace and led by His Spirit, not threatened by law and provoked by shame. Do you work well under this type of pressure? Take marriage or friendship, for example. Is your idea of a happy relationship one in which you are bullied into compliance, punished for disobedience, or rewarded for good behavior? God forbid! The new creation God made us was never meant to be under law. **We can’t be completely at peace and free when “living” under the law system or if we combine law with grace.** It isn’t what God intended when He gave His only Son.

Perhaps it's because we don't entirely trust God's grace in the lives of others. Instead of leaving people alone to pray to their heart's content without a structure every minute of every day, we have to impose a man-made standard of a certain number of minutes each day devoted *only* to prayer. That way, we and they can keep an account. We rob people of the joy of constant relationship and replace it with religion at every opportunity by setting man-made goals of praying one hour or two, or we devise systems so that constant prayer will be offered. On top of that, some teach that if we don't read the Bible daily, we will eventually fall away, and for this reason, prescribe a certain amount of reading a day or a certain study program, completely ignoring the fact that the first believers turned the world upside down without individually owning a Bible in the form we have it today. Witnessing becomes unnatural and stiff and intimidating as we teach program after program of how to present the gospel. Faith is replaced with fear at every corner. Service becomes mandatory instead of a ministry born out of love.

If we see a believer struggling, do we teach them about what Jesus has done to help them? Not usually. Customarily, we prescribe some sort of formula for them to fix themselves or their situation. If their children are acting up, we promote "tough love". If their marriage is failing, we give them the latest marriage book or send them to a marriage conference (usually one of the spouses dragging the other against his/her will). If they are struggling with sin, do we teach them why they are free from sin? Not normally. It seems much easier to load more laws upon them.

Beloved, we are robbing God's sheep of the joy of their salvation by teaching formula living and behavior modification instead of teaching what Christ accomplished for us, and who He made us as a *gift*, and by not allowing the love and joy that comes from that knowledge to guide them.

We don't openly believe in "beating the sheep", but many do it almost weekly without even knowing it sometimes. The same formula is employed continuously. We whack them with, "This is what is wrong with you," then smack them, saying, "And this is what *you* need to do to fix it." **We seldom proclaim what Jesus has done to help them.** Why, some sheep are so used to being beaten up on Sundays that if they don't feel the pastor "read their mail" by pointing out their faults, they don't feel as if they've "been to church". Think of this because it is entirely sick and dreadfully sad. They are like broken-down children who are so accustomed to abuse that they are actually comforted by it.

Each and every week, 52 weeks a year, year after year for decades they hear how they are not measuring up. Is it any wonder that many sheep just give up? We are tempted to think they aren't coming to church because *they* lack commitment or are falling away, or perhaps we blame ourselves for not being dynamic enough, but could it be possible that some of them are smart enough to escape our abuse or that God, in His

infinite mercy, is *leading* them away from us?

God's sheep are starving and emaciated, and the church is largely to blame. Instead of feeding them the milk and meat of the word of God, we've fed them fodder. Most churches these days don't even teach basic doctrines such as the nature of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, and His second coming, let alone the "*glad tidings of good things*". We can't even speak of His glorious accomplishments and His amazing blessings to us without feeling we need to tag on a condition.

We don't want the sheep to think that grace is cheap, so we make them *pay* for it. We don't want them to get lazy, so we put them to work.

When we view our spiritual practices as something other than the *fruit* of what *He* has accomplished and begin to see our traditions as the *means* by which *we* perfect what He has done, we are living under a mixture of law and grace. This is the same as saying that when Jesus said, "It is finished," He really meant, "It is only just begun"—that His redemption was enough to save us, but in order to be kept until the day of ultimate salvation, *we* must complete certain religious practices.

It is "another" gospel to reason that Jesus died and rose again to make us only *capable* of obeying the law instead of teaching that we are new creations, completely free from it.

Jesus *died* to set us free from law and *give* us grace. Grace isn't cheap, but it *is* absolutely free. That's the point. All of the marvels that are ours are *received* as gifts purchased for us with *His* blood, not ours.