

GRACE vs. LAW

We are told in the first Chapter of John: "The Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Unnumbered columns have been written about this grace vs. law. Tonight I am speaking not from theory, I am speaking from experience. We are called on to pass on to other generations, succeeding generations, our testimony. We are told in the First Epistle of John 1:1-3: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes . . . that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us." These are the two births that take place in every individual in the world. No one brings about his own physical birth. He is born by the action of powers not his own. And so, no one brings about his own spiritual birth. He is born by the action of powers beyond his own. The first - we admit we are here, clothed in this garment of flesh. We find ourselves here but we know we had not a thing to do about it. We simply found ourselves. You will find yourself born spiritually in the same miraculous manner. You will be born from above, just as you were born here from below. Then there will be God's mightiest act, and you will be begotten and born from above, by the action of powers not your own.

We turn first to the law. In the very beginning God established the law of identical harvest: "And let the earth put forth vegetation, trees yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit, in which is their seed, each according to its own kind." Here we find that the harvest is nothing more than the multiplication of the identical seed. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows so shall he reap." That is this world, this law. Tonight I will show you what I have found about this sowing.

Causation in our world is really mental. It was not always known as a mental state; it was believed (in the beginning) to be spiritual. And so laws were instituted and men abided by these laws. Outwardly they observed the laws. Then came the great revelation of "grace" that interpreted the law, thus bringing grace. For, says he: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them." And then he interprets law for us and puts it on a mental plane. "You have heard it said by men of old, 'Thou shalt not'" and then he states it. "But I say unto you," and then he puts it on an entirely different level and not one statement conveys it more graphically than this one: "You have heard it said of old 'Thou shalt not commit adultery, but I say unto you, to look on a woman lustfully is to already have committed the act with her in your heart.'" To restrain the impulse, that is not good enough; but not having the desire, for then you haven't committed the act. But to have the desire, and because of the consequences of your act you restrain the impulse, that is still not good enough - the act was committed with the impulse.

Here, we are on an entirely different level, a mental level, and this is what I have discovered about this level. I can stand here physically, and be in any part of this world mentally by assuming that I am there, then, viewing the world from that assumption rather than thinking of that state. Standing here, if I desire to be elsewhere, though at the moment my reason tells me I can't afford it, my senses tell me I haven't the time - you are committed, you will be here next Friday, you couldn't get there and be back so here you are stuck. Well, I

know from my own experience that if I dared to do it, though everything in this world would tie me here, there will be a reshuffling of the events of life and compel the journey on my part, and it worked. That assumption of mine would build a bridge of incidents across which I would move to the fulfillment of that state. No power in the world could stop it. I will walk across a series of events from the moment that I do it. Things would happen to compel me to go, and I, physically - the man - could not resist it. That would compel the journey.

Now the same thing is true not only of a physical journey but a journey into other states, like wealth, faith, like anything in this world. Suppose at this moment I desired certain security that I do not now enjoy - I hunger for it. What would it now be like if I were in possession of security? Let me now make the same psychological motion - all in my imagination - and then view the world from that assumption, just as though it were true. If I dare to assume that it is so - I can acquaint you with this law and then leave you to your choice and its consequences. Many a person who had nothing, who hungered for wealth, and they got it, but oh! what things happened to them when they got it! They wanted it and if you want it, take it. You can always give it up, but here is the law by which man moves in this world.

So, I will acquaint you with the law and show you how I operate it and how it works. But may I tell you: no matter how good you are in this world, no matter how wise you operate the law, it doesn't in any way qualify you for the second radical change in your mind, which is called "grace" - that is the second birth: the twice-born man has received "grace." And grace is God's gift of himself to man. That is grace. No matter how wise you are, you are on a wheel with the first birth. Play it as wisely as you can, and I hope you will play it wisely when you hear the law and how to operate it. But it cannot in way qualify you for the second birth. That is grace, that is the gift, and you cannot bring that about anymore than you brought about the first.

Now the second birth is sheer fantasy. It is called, not salvation - grace is salvation. "What must I do?" they asked. For he made the statement: "What if you own the whole vast world and lose your life?" Then he said: "It is so much easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." And they said to him: "Well, then who can be saved?" He said: "With men it is impossible, but nothing is impossible to God." With man, yes, it is impossible; he can't save himself. When man tells you he is a self-made man he is not speaking of any knowledge of this mystery. No self-made man. For this is the gift, the second is a complete gift.

And what is the secret of God's election? I do not know, I can't tell you. I can share with you what I have experienced and tell you how it comes. It is a process, something that happened so suddenly. It comes without warning - no one knows the moment it is going to come, and suddenly you are born. You are actually born. You are consciously born. I have no conscious memory of being born from my mother's womb, none whatsoever. I was born on a certain day of a certain month of a certain year, and on a certain little island in the West Indies. I had no knowledge of it, and then gradually consciousness possessed me, and when I was four (or not quite four) I began to function consciously with memory - but memory didn't go back to my birth. But the second birth is something as though you were actually doing it yourself, and every moment of time is conscious and so vividly alive. The whole thing you are doing, and the very moment to the end of birth is taking place in you, and out of your own wonderful being you are coming, and until that moment you didn't know you were dead. You took it for granted you were alive and that one day your body would die. And so, whether you survived or not, you didn't know, but that would be death and those who saw you put away, whether cremated or in the earth, they would speak of you as someone who was dead, but not while you

walked the earth with them. And yet, there comes the moment in time when suddenly a power beyond your wildest dreams is taking place in you. And you aren't doing it, you have no control. It is being done to you and as the power is intensified, you awake. And you always thought prior to that moment, you were awake, you were alive and walking about the earth. And here for the first time in eternity you are awakening in a tomb, and the tomb is your skull. And you find this being completely sealed and entombed in your own skull and you are fully awake for the first time in eternity.

Then begins the work and you come out as one being self-born, truly begotten by yourself, and out you come. The entire drama as described for us in the gospel you are enacting - you are being self-born. The witnesses become present and they are here to witness this event in eternity. They can't see you because you are invisible, but you are more real than they are, more real than anything in the world at that moment - and yet, you are invisible. Then you know what it means: "God is Spirit and those who worship Him worship in spirit and in truth." "And as God has life in himself - God the father - so now he grants the son to have life in himself." All of a sudden you awake, and the force - the intense power you feel coming from you that now seems to be in the corner of the room - is centered all over. All of a sudden it comes to the end and you return once more, fully clothed, in this simple little garment out of which you have just for a moment emerged. It is the most fantastic garment in the world.

That was grace but it comes in stages. It has three fantastic parts to it. That first one is simply your birth from above to fulfill the 3rd [chapter] of John: "You must be born from above, for unless you be born from above you cannot in anywise enter the Kingdom of Heaven," which fulfills that chapter. Then comes the second, when God really gives you himself. Suddenly a similar power possesses you and you can't stop it, not a thing you can do about it. Suddenly as you are tied with it, your whole being explodes, and here he presents you with his son.

Now the 17th verse of the 1st chapter [of John], after you are told: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (we are told how it comes through Jesus Christ), we are told: "No man has ever seen the Father; the Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." And you didn't know you contained within you the son of God, and suddenly there is an explosion and he is standing before you and he calls you "father." You don't see yourself; he calls you "father" and you know he is your son. Here the father-son relationship is established forever. He calls you "father" to fulfill the 89th Psalm: "I have found David, my servant. . ." and he has "cried out to me 'Thou art my Father, my God, the Rock of my salvation'" - the fulfillment of the great messianic 89th Psalm. You look at him and there is no doubt in your mind who he is and there is no doubt in his mind who you are.

In the 3rd chapter [of John], in the great gift, he explains: Out of the blue you are torn in two from top to bottom and then you are sent, a living being, something that is fire and alive, and you ascend right into Zion, which is yourself. These three parts mark the great gift. No one in this world is good enough to earn it, therefore all will get it. God actually expresses to man a mercy with which man is incapable, with his conscience, of ever judging himself as worthy of. No man in this world with conscience and mercy could ever judge himself as mercifully as God judges him.

So what man has done - I certainly have done it, you have done it, the whole vast world has done it, and we are so fearful while we are here in this world of law, of doing it - and in spite of our limitations, in spite of our weaknesses, God's infinite mercy brings about the second birth. And we are all taken up in this eternal place

where we are put into the everlasting temple which God is making out of us, making out of himself. For he gives himself to man before man can be free to begin the everlasting temple. No one can fill your place. No one can fill my place. Not one can be displaced. Not one in any way can be rubbed out. The temple will be unfinished. I know from my own experience not one can be unsaved, I don't care who he is, no matter what he has done in this world, everyone will be saved. What must I do to be saved? Believe the Gospel.

Now we are told we can delay it; that is why I find it difficult to believe that. But still it is Scripture. Hebrews 4:2: "And the good news preached unto us was also preached unto them; but it did not benefit them, because it was not mixed with faith in the hearer." Tonight some of you could reject it, and that may appear on the surface to delay your call. It may, I do not know. I have no assurance that you can delay it; but it would appear that rejection on the part of one - because he heard it but did not accept it, because it didn't make sense to him - though you reject it and maybe by your rejection delay your call, eventually you will be called, because he puts you through all the paces of the world until finally you have no power to reject the story when you hear it.

But while we are here in this world of law, let me now quote you the 1st Psalm. It is a marvelous benediction: "Blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord, who meditates on it day and night . . . for in all that he does, he prospers." "In all that he does," not a few things. And the law is so simple. If you go to the foundation it is mental, not physical. Go to church, as people who practice it outwardly thought would in some way bring good for them. That wasn't it. It's mental. Causation is mental, so the law is mental. Find the law: "Blessed is the man who delights in the law, meditating on it day and night, for in all that he does he prospers." Walk now by faith, not by sight. Romans 17:4: "He calls a thing that is not seen as though it were seen and the unseen becomes seen." "For the things that are seen," we are told, "were made from things that do not appear." We see a man - well what made him what he is? He once assembled certain states and knowingly or unknowingly he fell into it, and falling into it he remained long enough to take on that initial statement of God: "All things must bring forth after their own kind." The law of identical harvest. The harvest is only the multiplication of the identical seed.

So I fall into a state. I do it wittingly or unwittingly, but I fall into a state. Remaining in the state, suddenly the stump comes out. Someone begins to appear in my world who is instrumental in making me move forward in the direction in which I should go. I may on reflection think he, the instrument that moved me forward by certain contacts, was the cause of my being forward. No, the cause was unseen. As you are told: "Things seen were made by things that do not appear." He appears, so he can't be the cause. If that is true then I will thank him for what he did but I can't claim he was the cause of my good fortune, though he introduced me to the right people and all things added up to the thing that I was doing. But the cause of it all was my assumption and my faithfulness to that assumption. So, I dare to assume that I am, or that you are what I would like you to be, and assuming that you are what I would like you to be, and feel that you would like to be it, I am unmoved in that assumption and you become it, without your knowledge or your consent. I don't need your consent or knowledge if causation is mental.

So I warn you of the law and leave you to your choice . . . and its risk, because you can use it unwisely. But my hands are now washed of that. I cannot stop it. I can't be like a mother over you, stating that you should not do this. As you are told in the Book of Deuteronomy: "I place before you this day good and evil, life and death, blessing and cursing; choose life." He suggests you choose life but he can't take from you the right, having set you free, to choose anything you want; it is all spread before you. If you imagine something

unlovely of another, he'll come to that. It will boomerang too, but it will come to pass, for you are entirely free to imagine anything in this world, for imagining creates reality. A man imagined - if he imagines it and persists in that imaginal act, it will come to pass. And that's the law.

If there were no other than the wise use of law - to own the whole vast world and yet not to be redeemed from that wheel of recurrence - this would become the most horrible hell in the world. Fortunately God started in the beginning a plan of redemption, and its grace, where he saved us from the wheel of recurrence. And what is his greatest secret, where he picks you at one moment of time, picks another at another moment of time to put him into that eternal structure, the everlasting temple not made with hands? I do not know. I only know he promised us to build a temple for us, anonymous. We are the temple, "We are the temple of the living God," a temple in which God will dwell, and yet we are free beyond the wildest dream of man. For we are God himself in the spot we call the "New Jerusalem."

So, here, use it wisely for yourself and for others. Every time you use your imagination lovingly on behalf of another you are literally mediating God to another. Do it. But even if you are the most loving, the most generous, the kindest being in the world, you still cannot by your own effort be born from above. It is a gift, an unearned gift and you can't be good enough. To me that is the most exciting thought in the world, because no man can look me in the eye and tell me he feels himself worthy of such a birth. With a memory and a conscience he couldn't possibly do it. And yet with my memory of the past I would say: "Neville, you are unworthy of it." Therefore, because I know in my heart I am unworthy, I can say to every being in the world: you are going to get it. If I felt I was worthy of it, then I would have to go out and try to make everyone good, as I conceived myself to be. But I don't conceive myself to be good, as the world calls good. I have done unnumbered things of which I would be ashamed, and still feel I am capable under stress of doing things of which I would be ashamed. And yet, I have had the grace of God, the second birth from above. I can't conceive of anything more encouraging in the world than to share with others your own experience and tell them that they cannot lift themselves by their own bootstraps.

This is an act of mercy, and mercy is God in expression because God is love and mercy is God in action. And the mightiest act of God is when you, the sound sleeper, he awakens and you don't know you are asleep. No child born of woman could cross the threshold that admits to conscious life without the death of God. He died to make me alive - the mystery of life through death, and then this mighty act of resurrecting himself as you. Then you know the mystery of the Epistle of John: "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know when he appears we shall be like him." We shall be like him, for there is no change in your identity. All of a sudden you awaken to the full glory of your inheritance. You have inherited heaven, but the full glory of that inheritance is not fully realized in you - or for the moment is not fully grasped by you while you are still in this body.

You must then play the part of the apostle, and share it with those who will listen to you, until that moment in time when he takes off the garment. Then that which ascended is completely displayed to you and to the heavenly host, but you have played and shared with the others all that you have experienced. It is called the apostolic testament: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard and seen with our eyes. That which we have seen and heard we now proclaim unto you that you may share with us this fellowship." And then that fabulous passage that always closes the Anglican service (which in our country is the Episcopal service), Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." What a benediction! What a benediction to say to a gathering like this: "That

may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,” (that is the second verse) “which comes from the love of God, that through whose birth you may have and share the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and may he be with you all.” That is how all Anglican services close, in the hope that someone, or maybe all, will in the not distant future share in that fellowship. To me it is the most inspiring just to read it and just try to feel it.

So grace vs. law is not really in conflict. For he said: “I have not come to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfill them.” Peter, in his first Epistle, (1:10) identifies grace with salvation: “The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation.” So he associates grace with salvation. The minute it is given he is saved, he’s been redeemed. But because no one can play your part, you will be redeemed. Don’t go back in memory and try to find other things you could undo towards salvation. Do that toward this world, to make yourself happier and free in this world, but not toward salvation. Because if it was not for God’s infinite mercy to hide your past from you, you couldn’t live with yourself. No man in this world could live with himself if he could now bring back into memory the past. He couldn’t because you’ll play all the parts. You have been a long, long time in coming and at the very end you will have played all the parts. Therefore, in the end you can say: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

There is a purpose to God’s play, a fabulous purpose. As Blake said: “Do not let yourself be intimidated by the horrors of the world. Everything is ordered and correct and must fulfill its destiny in order to achieve perfection.” So we have all played it. Had I not played all the horrible parts in the world I could not be merciful when I read about them in the papers. I could not in my heart feel that some mercy should be stressed nor have the impulse for mercy had I not played it. But in the end, having played all you will forgive all. And so, everything in the world, you’ll have played all and therefore fitted yourself for God’s use in the building of His temple.

I can’t get away from a sense of predestination when I read Scripture. Romans 8:28-30: “We are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son. And those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.” You cannot take these five terms: foreknowledge, predestination, called, justified, and glorified, and interpret them in any way to avoid the conclusion of predestination. I don’t see how you can. “You were with me in the foundation of time,” you are told. He called us in the beginning before the world was. And now he calls us according to his purpose when this section of his fabulous (you can’t conceive of it) living structure is about to be completed. And only you can fit one portion of it, so he calls you. And the one he calls he has predestined, but he calls. And the one he calls he justifies. You can’t be justified by your actions; he justifies you. And then he glorifies you. And glorification is the gift of himself as told us in John 17:5: “Father, glorify me with thine own self.” So, he glorifies the individual with himself. The entire five terms leads to one conclusion of a predestined, foreknown state. He foreknew the entire thing and is building towards it.

Now the opposite of grace is disgrace. The Bible speaks of it as the “wrath of God,” the “anger of God.” We know what it is to be in disgrace. Grace is the unearned gift, the greatest thing in the world, the gift of God himself. And the opposite would be almost the absence of God. Jeremiah 23 makes this statement: “The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand it clearly.” It seems that God has forsaken us when we go through a war, when we are going through some horrible disgrace where the world has collapsed upon us. A child has gone astray and society frowns upon us because we are the parents of that child. Or maybe my husband or wife has done something to disgrace the family, the community. God has forsaken us. So I pass through the fires

of affliction, these horrible fiery ordeals, displaced (the opposite of place) where once he was with me and guided me. But “He will not turn back until he has accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand it clearly.” And you will forgive all and be happy that he in his infinite wisdom and mercy could put you through that fiery ordeal to bring you out qualified to fit in his eternal temple.

So no one will be condemned in the end. No one will be unsaved. When they ask you: “What must I do to be saved?” go to the Scripture and show that with man it isn’t possible. (That is the 10th chapter of Mark, 26-27.) With man, no, it isn’t possible, but with God all things are possible. They couldn’t understand how a man could be saved after he told them what he had, about the camel and the rich man. The rich man does not necessarily mean a man with money. The 1st Beatitude tells you: “Blessed are the poor in spirit for they shall receive the kingdom.” The poor in spirit is the one who is not complacent. Not everyone who has money is complacent. You could be socially prominent and very complacent. You could be intellectually a star, have your PhD’s or your degrees behind you, and you are above it all. You know everything because conferred upon you is the degree given by man. In this world of ours there is so much of real learned ignorance. I am not saying that all who have degrees are snobs. You cannot by these earn the kingdom, no matter what you do. For the “Wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God.” Not a thing that man knows here through his efforts will in any way function where he is destined to be. For he is rising into a world that will be completely subject to his imaginative power. Everything in the world will be under his control. Because God, having given himself to man, God being all-wise he’ll be all-wise. God being all-powerful, all-loving, he’ll be all-powerful, all-loving, for he gives himself to man. And so, you will not be replaced by anyone and all will be equal in the eyes of God, because it is himself. He can’t be more than what he gave you. And one will not be greater because you can’t get more than what God gave you, for he gave you himself, as though there were no others in the world, just God and you. And finally only you.

Now let us go into the silence.