

## Exodus 20:18 (James Butler Stoney) 171299

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Ex. 20:18; Luke 23:39 to the End

One of these passages of Scripture sets forth Law and Grace together, and in the other passage you have the results of law and grace. What I mean by the results is, what they do for us; and that is set forth in the New Testament passage which we have just read. I get law and grace put together in the twentieth chapter of Exodus; but I do not get the results till thousands of years after. I get the results when Christ dies; that is, when grace comes to perfection. For instance, in this scene of the thief on the Cross, we have grace come to perfection. But grace and law are quite different. Law has a claim upon you, and a just claim. If it were not a just claim it would not trouble you. The more you insist upon a just claim to a person who is unable to meet it, the more you can make him averse to it. Consequently, in this passage in the twentieth chapter of Exodus, the law came with thunderings and lightnings, and great noises, "and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off." The people not being able to meet the demand, does not mitigate the present claim, for the very justice of that claim is what aggravates it. God had a right to make the claim, just as a landlord has a right to the rent of his tenant; and if he insists upon his right, supposing the tenant to be poor, he makes a bankrupt of him; at least he has a right to do so. If a landlord insists upon his right, and you find your incompetence to meet the claim, it brings you simply to this point, that you must sue (in legal phrase) in the form of a pauper—that is, you must sue for mercy. The law makes you sensible that if you are unable to meet the claim, but still admit the claim, you are a fit subject for grace. You must plead, "I cannot do anything. I am unjust and undone. If I do not get help now I am ruined." Yes, that is the way grace comes in. I am only sketching out to you what I will now proceed to prove.

What is the effect of the Law as God's claim upon man when man is unable to meet that claim. He is at a distance from God; then the whole point is to effect a reconciliation. If the landlord says, "You must meet such and such a claim," and the tenant answers, "What is the good of insisting on it when I have not a farthing," what will grace do? Suppose that there is goodness in the landlord's heart, and he says, "I do not want to ruin you, but I will make you one of my children." The landlord does not ask his children to pay rent. The tenants under the law are made children by grace. He says, "I will forgive you all, and I will transfer you from tenants to children:" that is Grace. Now which will you stand upon? Will you be tenants or children? You are, at this present hour, either the one or the other. All whom I address are either tenants or children. You are all owing God something, or you may answer, "It is all cleared away?" But that is the other side—that is Grace. Everyone who goes home from hearing me must either go a tenant, or (as I hope will be the case), go home a child. That is when all is cleared away by the blood of God's own Son; then you are children by grace, and children are not to pay. "Well," you will say, "what is the good of having a claim?" The good of having a claim is to prove that you must come in by grace; because if you cannot pay, you must come in by grace. It is clear enough in Scripture, and plain enough to everyone who has tried to understand it; and I am sure many of my hearers have tried it. You have tried to keep up your engagements. That is quite right. I do not like idle tenants; but I like to see a man who labors hard to meet the rent when it is due. I like to see industrious hard-working tenants. But sometimes they are not able to keep up to their own resolution's, then how can they meet God's sense of righteousness when they cannot keep up to their own sense of righteousness?

"Therefore, the children of Israel removed and stood afar off." I hope that everyone now hearing me has the fear of God before him. I think it is a great thing to fear. I remember, my beloved friends, what fear I was in once. I was very young at the time: I think about seventeen or eighteen. I was reading in the newspapers that the cholera was only about six miles away from the place where I was living. I was very religious. I read the Bible four times a-day, but I was in such a state, that at last I was on the floor; and I said to myself, "What are you afraid of?" And I answered, "I am afraid to die; I am afraid to meet the Holy God." Yet I was religious. I used to go to church—even four times a-day. But I was a tenant, you see, and I knew that I had not the rent. I knew that if the day of judgment came I could not meet the Lord. And thus you will find that, when the Lord came to the children of Israel on pay-day, there were thunderings and lightnings; and "the people removed and stood afar off," because they could not face the Lord. Thus the distance is made wider. Did you ever see a tenant, who had not the rent when it was due, seeing his landlord coming down one side of the street? I am sure you would see that tenant cross to the other. That is not reconciliation—for he is trying to avoid him. That is what the Law does, You know that you are owing him, and you are afraid to face him. Now the wonderful thing is this, where you fear most, you are most at home. The place you fear most is that which is filled with the righteousness of God for you. That is the very place for you. Why does a child like to sit next its mother? Because that is the safest spot for that child. You fear God, because He has a demand upon you, and He has a right to that demand. If He had not a right, it would not trouble you at all. You would say, He has no claim upon me. But if you are owing one a debt you would avoid him, because the righteousness of the claim does not effect a reconciliation; but, on the contrary, it causes a greater distance between you. Therefore, the people removed and stood afar off. That was the effect of the Law.

Now let me read to you what Grace is: — "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt-offerings and thy peace-offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee." That is grace; for there is to be One to bear what is the penalty of your failings, and not only to bear that penalty, but to have an excellency in Himself. He is the firstling of the flock. He is a victim not chargeable with our offenses, but bearing our offenses, and having a personal excellency at the time of bearing them. If you understand that, and it is very simple, you will understand what is the nature of sacrifice. I will explain this better when I come to the New Testament, but I only want to show you, in the meantime, how the two things go together—the victim bearing our offenses; and having a personal excellence at the time of bearing them. The Lord says, "There are certain places where I record my name, and there I will come to thee and bless thee."

That is grace; and I want to say one word about the conditions which are connected with grace. There are two conditions one is, that you must not lift your hand to take any part in it, or you will pollute it; and the other is, that you must not raise your foot. When the tenant is

unable to pay the rent, and when grace is about to be extended to him by the landlord, the landlord says to him, "Now you must stop all efforts of your own. You must do nothing but take what I give you. If you stir hand or foot you spoil everything, because you must let me have the credit of it all." The tenant knows that he cannot play, and when he is pressed for it his position is embittered, because he admits the right, and, at the same time, feels his inability to satisfy the demand. In that position, you must listen to grace. The landlord will extend the grace to you; but he says, "I have two conditions to impose, and they are, that you must not stir hand nor foot—you are not to do anything at all you have merely to receive it." "Must I do nothing?" "No." "Must I do no works for it?" "No." "Must I make no exertion for it?" "No; you must not stir hand nor foot, or you will put a stop to it." Your questions show that you do not believe in grace. Christ comes so near to you with it, that you must not go a step for it. The poor man who was lying at the point of death at the roadside did not go a step to meet the Good Samaritan who came to give to him. What was the use of a man lying half-dead, unable to move hand or foot, trying to go a step to meet the Good Samaritan? The good man makes a child of him, makes no claim, but does all for him. He poured oil and wine into his wounds, and put him on his beast, and walked alongside of him. Now, mark these conditions, because when I come to the two things—law and grace—you will find the grand thing that I have to maintain: that the man who is saved is simply a recipient. You may say to me, "Why did you go to church four times on Sunday, as you spoke of?" It was simply because I thought I would make God look more favorably upon me; that is, because I was a tenant at the time, and I thought if I went to church four times on Sunday, I would get on the better all the week. But it was altogether different when I became a child. Now look at the New Testament, and you will see the results of grace. We have both law and grace, and it points out that the ruin which Adam brought is now all reversed by the Son of God, and that there is to be a complete renovation for every believer.

In this New Testament passage, we have Christ crucified. The Lamb of God is suffering; and two thieves are crucified along with Him. They are now in the grip of the law, and they are suffering its vengeance. They have broken the law, they are nailed on the cross, and they are dying without mercy. One of them repents. It is not merely a death-bed repentance, but it shows us that when the law takes its course to the utmost, grace comes in, and Christ says, "I accept the punishment: the just for the unjust." That is grace; therefore law and grace come together.

The great principles of the twentieth chapter of Exodus are brought out in the twenty-third of Luke. There is no mercy in the law itself. He who breaks the law must die without mercy. When the law finds you out it condemns you. If I go to a tenant and say, "You owe me the rent, and I claim it at once;" if that man cannot pay me, it is all over with him so far as the law is concerned. There is no hope for him. Now these two thieves are in the grip of the law. In a very little moment they will be launched into the fearful endless eternity of the condign punishment by the law, to bear the judgment of God forever. I want you to look at what the law brings men to. You say, "Oh! we are not thieves." I would like to see the man who would stand up and say that he never broke the law, and if you broke the law, do you think that God will let you pass? The Scripture says that if you offend in one point, you are guilty of all. If you take the position of a tenant, you are in a bad position, and I grieve for you. You hear people constantly saying that they are in a miserable condition, and there is no remedy. Don't talk in such a way; for you have been told the remedy, but won't take it. Suppose a man has got some disease, and I say, "Here is an infallible cure for it." Do you pity that man if he does not take the cure? Not a bit. An infidel comes to me and says, "I don't believe in that book." "Don't you?" I answer. "Very well. I am under the judgment of death and I find in this what is the matter with me, and I also find what will cure me, and the cure is mentioned in the most distinct manner." The infidel says, "I don't believe a word of it." I ask him, "If you deny this cure what better cure do you give me in its place?" "I have not got any," he says. "Very well," I retort, "you may walk off, because this is all nonsense on your part. Here is a book that actually describes, in the most penetrating manner, my soul's state, and, in as distinct a manner, gives me a remedy for that state, and you will not believe it as much as you would believe in the cure one gives you for a bodily disease, but if you had a pill for the cure of it, and had millions of people who would testify to the efficacy of it, I defy the world to disprove its efficacy, and you would use it until you got something better to supersede it. But all the skill in the world cannot take a man out of death. Death is the terrible thing that has got no law. There are laws for every, thing in nature. Organization proves that there has been a primary cause."

Now I turn back to this wonderful scene, and I find the two thieves on the Cross, one on either side the blessed Lord, and they did not know it. One of them says, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." "If" There is not a tenant among us who does not say "if." That little word is what keeps the terrible darkness in your souls, that makes you unable to see grace. You know of Jesus very well, and so did this thief: but he did not see grace, because he had an "if." That little word "if" was his ruin. What a sad thing, my beloved friends, to think that hereafter you should say, "that word 'if' has been my ruin." Now drop the "if" and say, "I am a poor wretched creature—I will only look for grace." But Christ and grace in this world are resisted. It is not only yourselves that will not have the good that is offered, but Satan also is resisting it, and you are morally blinded. A light is in the room, but you may not see it. I am sorry for that, but still the light is here, and it shows you Jesus. It is the light of the glory of Christ. That was what cheered the thief, Christ is the one who is come to pay our debt.

For example: a man owes an inconceivable debt, and another man comes and says, "I will pay it all." The debtor believes, but he is first in an anxious state. When he sees his friend go into the bank, he is in a hopeful state, and when he sees him come out of the bank with the receipt in his hand, he is in an assured state. That is grace and the reconciliation. Well, there is another thing: God is so well pleased at the way in which the debt has been paid by the Son, that He is raised from the dead, by the glory of the Father. It is not only that I see Him risen with the receipt in His hand, but He has done it in such a way, that He is glorified for it. The bank has determined that from henceforth they will have an illumination day and night, to commemorate the way in which this debt has been discharged. Every time I saw the bank before, I was in bitter trouble about the debt I owed to it, but now every time I look at it, I see the light—the wonderful continued light—and I do not feel troubled anymore because I see the expression of the divine satisfaction, with regard to the way in which my debt has been paid. And it is not only how I feel, but how God feels. Before this time you were afraid to go into the bank, in fact you dare not go in, because you would have been taken prisoner. But now if you go into the bank, you are the most marked man there. They will say, "Here is the man who owed such a large debt, and a friend came and paid it all. Here is the man who dared not show his face in heaven, and now he is a most welcome man." Language fails me to express the beauty of all this.

Now the thief on the Cross knew the law, but he did not know Christ. He is in the hands of the law, and his companion turns round to him and says, "dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" One of old, of whom you have all heard, John Bunyan, says that God never begins to play upon an instrument but He begins upon the base note. The thief says to his comrade, "Dost not thou fear God?" "We receive the due reward of our deeds." That is law. But he says, "I have received a sight of Christ; This man hath done nothing amiss." What a wonderful thing! The poor thief or sinner dying under the law of condign punishment without mercy, gets the pure light, and can read

the history of that man, as spotless from the hour he came into this world. That is the light which is disclosed by Christ to him. You say, "Was it by the natural eye he saw Him?" No, it was by the spiritual eye. How could he tell his whole history by the natural eye? Nothing but the Spirit of God could make such a wonderful disclosure to the thief; the disclosure that the just was suffering for the unjust, to bring him to God.

Did you ever see him? (I must come to close quarters). Did you ever see Christ? can you say, "I have got the Firstling of the flock, offered up for me, the spotless One of God?" I think you can hardly estimate what a wonderful thing it is, this disclosure, to a man who is about to suffer for his iniquity—a man who was so wicked that the world could not put up with him. The law has put him in such a position that he could not stir hand or foot. Now grace comes in, and what are the conditions? We ought to be thankful for what the law does, for it puts us in a position to receive grace. That man was pinioned by the law, so that he could not move hand or foot. Hand means work, and foot means exertion. What could he do? He could say, "He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life." Jonathan did not raise hand or foot for the destruction of Goliath, but he saw David do it all. The man who was owing the large amount of debt did not raise hand or foot to clear it away, but he saw his friend go into the bank and come out with the receipt in his hand, and then he saw a great light from the bank, and he was sure everything was done without the least exertion on his part. Thus the thief on the Cross, without stirring hand or foot got the blessed assurance, "today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." This just shows when things come to the final issue, what the law brings a man to, and what grace brings him to. God gave His own Son as an offering, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to Himself. The wonderful action of grace is also beautifully shown in the three parables, in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's gospel. It is a proof that you are converted, when you pray to Christ. It was quite the opposite in the garden of Eden, for there Eve trusted herself, but here is a reversal of all that, and the work is done by the Spirit of God. Christ suffers the judgment and brings restoration to the soul. The point of departure is the point where restoration comes in.

Now the thief prays, "Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom;" Now this thief not only received grace, but the effect of grace comes out in him. The man has got a new taste. It is a wrong statement to say that thieves are in heaven. There is no such thing as a thief in heaven. Those who were thieves are in heaven; but that is entirely a different thing, and so Christ says to this man, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." The first man lost the paradise of men on earth, and now Christ comes and discharges man's debt, so that He can bring him into a new paradise—the paradise of God.

Now, how does that bear upon us? I do not believe that any person who has really got the new taste can put up with his old ways. This poor thief has got a new taste, and what does he say? He says, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." The Lord says, I will do more for you than that, for "today shalt thou be with me in paradise," where you will be in the perfect enjoyment of everything that is beautiful and perfect. There are two things which mark a converted man. He prays to God, putting his trust and dependence upon Him; and he has got a new taste—he would like to be where Christ has the rule.

Do you remember what the disciples said to Jesus when He first spoke to them? They said, "Where do you dwell?" Now, I ask any converted person present, "Are you not looking for the place where Christ dwells?" You say, "It is in heaven, and I cannot get there yet." No; but if I cannot get the whole, I would like to get it by installments. When the disciples asked Christ where He dwelt, what was the answer? "Come and see."

Do you think He would not say that now? A man gets a sense of being holy when he is converted; and do you think that a holy man would not like to be in a holy place? I think the society of the unholy would be very intolerable to him. He has got a taste for his Saviour, for he has got the same nature as his Saviour, and wants to be where He is. If I cannot be in paradise, I would like to be in the next best thing. I cannot put up with evil when I have seen His beautiful holiness. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

Well, beloved friends, I need not dwell more upon this; but I will put it to each one of you, "Are you tenants or children?" Let each of you, as you walk out of this place, put the question to yourselves, are you tenants or children. How I wish I could dilate upon this point—how this poor thief has seen the Holy One, and his heart is enraptured. He sees the Lamb of God, and he has confidence in Him. He has got a sense of what is in the heart of the Lord, and therefore his confidence is awakened. He confesses that confidence, and has got the comfortable assurance of Christ, that that day he would be in the perfect enjoyment of all that is pure and lovely and divine, and that he would be in company with the One whose blood was shed for him, and who loved him.

The Lord lead our hearts, my beloved friends, to realize this! I wish I could affect you with the solemn reality that the light of Christ is shining here, whether it is shining into your souls or not. The light of Christ is shining here more surely than ever the sun shone. Why do you not all see it? There were two thieves on the Cross. The one was quite as near to Christ as the other; but the one saw the light of Christ, while the other did not. The Spirit of God comes to bring the light into the soul, and therefore you find the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, and the Father, all engaged in the conversion of a single soul. The shepherd comes after the lost sheep: the Spirit brings light to our souls: and the Father takes us in.

The Lord lead your souls to understand that the only One who can save you is Christ. You cannot meet God as a tenant. You must say, "The Lord help me to be sensible that I am utterly incapable of doing anything for myself: I must look only to Christ." That is what the law has brought you to, and the law has done you good service. The law brought the poor penitent thief to the condition that he could do nothing for himself, and therefore he was a fit recipient for grace. First, there is fear on his part. He says, "Dost not thou fear God?" and the next thing that he knows is love. You see there are only two states—first, Fear; and then Love.

May the Lord grant that not one here present will say "if" now that he is brought face to face with Christ Never say "if," but say, "I believe in Christ?" What do you want now? I want to be where Christ has the rule.

J. B. S.

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