

Articles and Sermons :: Under Law or Under Grace - Bunyan

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The following is taken from John Bunyan's book *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded*

But, you will say, for all this, We cannot believe that we are under the law, for these reasons—As, First. Because we have found a change in our hearts. Second. Because we do deny that the Covenant of Works will save any. Third. Because, for our parts, we judge ourselves far from legal principles; for we are got up into as perfect a Gospel order, as to matter of practice and discipline in church affairs, as any this day in England, as we judge.

That man's belief that is grounded upon anything done in him, or by him only, that man's belief is not grounded upon the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of Jesus Christ; for that man that hath indeed good ground of his eternal salvation, his faith is settled upon that object which God is well pleased or satisfied withal, which is that man that was born of Mary, even her first-born Son— that is, he doth apply by faith to his soul the virtues of His death, blood, righteousness, etc., and doth look for satisfaction of soul nowhere else than from that, neither doth the soul seek to give God any satisfaction as to justification any other ways; but doth willingly and cheerfully accept of and embrace the virtues of Christ's death, together with the rest of His things done by Himself on the cross as a sacrifice, and since also as a priest, advocate, mediator, etc.; and doth so really and effectually receive the glories of the same, that thereby—mark that—thereby he is "changed into the same image, from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18). Thus in general; but yet more particular—

1. To think that your condition is good because there is some change in you from a loose profane life, to a more close, honest, and civil life and conversation; I say, to think this testimony sufficient to ground the stress of thy salvation upon is very dangerous. First, because such a soul doth not only lay the stress of its salvation besides the man Christ Jesus that died upon the cross; but secondly, because that his confidence is not grounded upon the Saviour of sinners, but upon his turning from gross sins to a more refined life,—and it may be to the performance of some good duties—which is no Saviour; I say, this is very dangerous; therefore read it, and the Lord help you to understand it; for unless you lay the whole stress of the salvation of your souls upon the merits of another man—namely, Jesus—and that by what He did do and is doing without you, for certain, as sure as God is in Heaven, your souls will perish. And this must not be notionally neither, as with an assenting of the understanding only; but it must be by the wonderful, invisible, invincible power of the Almighty God, working in your souls by His Spirit such a real, saving, holy faith, that can, through the operation of the same Spirit by which it is wrought, lay hold on and apply these most heavenly, most excellent, most meritorious benefits of the man Christ Jesus, not only to your heads and fancies, but to your very souls and consciences, so effectually, that you may be able by the same faith to challenge the power, madness, malice, rage, and destroying nature either of sin, the law, death, the devil, together with Hell and all other evils, throwing your souls upon the death, burial, resurrection, and intercession of that man Jesus without (Rom 8:32-39). But,

2. Do you think that there was no change in the five foolish virgins spoken of (Matt 25:1-3). Yes; there was such a change in those very people, that the five wise ones could give them admittance of walking with them in the most pure ways and institutions of the Gospel of Christ, and yet but foolish; nay, they walked with them, or shall walk with them, until the Lord Jesus Christ shall break down from Heaven, and yet be but foolish virgins, and yet but under the law, and so under the curse, as I said before.

But, say you, We have disowned the Covenant of Works, and turned from that also.

This is sooner said than done. Alas, alas! poor souls think because they say, "Grace, grace, it is freely by grace," therefore they are under the Covenant of Grace. A very wide mistake. You must understand thus much, that though you be such as can speak of the grace of the Gospel, yet if you yourselves be not brought under the very Covenant of Grace, you are yet, notwithstanding your talk and profession, very far wide of a sense and of a share in the Covenant of the Grace of God held forth in the Gospel.

The Jews were of a clearer understanding many of them than to conclude that the law, and only the law, was the way to salvation; for they, even they that received not the Christ of God, did expect a Saviour should come (John 7:27,41-43). But they were men that had not the Gospel Spirit, which alone is able to lead them to the very life, marrow, or substance of the Gospel in right terms; and so being muddy in their understandings, being between the thoughts of a Saviour and the

e thoughts of the works of the law, thinking that they must be accomplished for the obtaining of a Saviour, and His mercy towards them; I say, between these they fell short of a Saviour. As many poor souls in these days, they think they must be saved alone by the Saviour, yet they think there is something to be done on their parts for the obtaining of the good-will of the Saviour, as their humiliation for sin, their turning from the same, their promises, and vows, and resolutions to become new men, join in church-fellowship, and what not; and thus they, bringing this along with them as a means to help them, they fall short of eternal salvation if they are not converted; see that Scripture (Rom 9:30-32). The Apostle saith there, that they that sought not did obtain, when they that did seek fell short. "What shall we say then?" saith he. "That the Gentiles which sought not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness," yea, "even the righteousness which is of faith." And what else? Why, "but Israel which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness." How came that to pass?

"Because," saith he, "they sought it not by faith, but as it were" mark, he doth not say, altogether, no, "but as it were" that is, because as they sought, they did a little by the bye lean upon the works of the law. And let me tell you, that this is such a hard thing to beat men off of, that though Paul himself did take the work in hand, he did find enough to do touching it; how is he fain to labour in the ten first chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, for the establishing of those that did even profess largely in the doctrine of grace, and also in that Epistle to the Galatians; and yet lost many, do what he could. Now, the reason why the doctrine of grace doth so hardly down even with professors; in truth, effectually, it is because there is a principle naturally in man that doth argue against the same, and that thus: Why, saith the soul, I am a sinner, and God is righteous, holy, and just; His holy Law, therefore, having been broken by me, I must, by all means, if ever I look to be saved, in the first place, be sorry for my sins; secondly, turn from the same; thirdly, follow after good duties, and practise the good things of the law and ordinances of the Gospel, and so hope that God for Christ's sake may forgive all my sins; which is not the way to God as a Father in Christ, but the way, the very way to come to God by the Covenant of Works, or the law, which things I shall more fully clear when I speak to the second doctrine.

Again, therefore, those that this day profess the Gospel, for the generality of them they are such, that, notwithstanding their profession, they are very ignorant of that glorious influence and lustre of the same; I say, they are ignorant of the virtue and efficacy of the glorious things of Christ held forth by and in the Gospel, which doth argue their not being under the Covenant of Grace, but rather under the law or old covenant (2 Cor 4:3). As, for instance, if you do come among some professors of the Gospel, in general you shall have them pretty busy and ripe; also able to hold you in a very large discourse in several points of the same glorious Gospel; but if you come to the same people and ask them concerning heart-work, or what work the Gospel hath wrought on them, and what appearance they have had of the sweet influences and virtues on their souls and consciences, it may be they will give you such an answer as this; I do find by the preaching thereof that I am changed, and turned from my sins in a good measure, and also have learned (but only in tongue), to distinguish between the law and the Gospel, so that for the one; that is, for the Gospel; I can plead, and also can show the weakness and unprofitableness of the other. And thus far, it is like they may go, which is not far enough to prove them under the Covenant of Grace, though they may have their tongues so largely tipped with the profession of the same (2 Peter 2:20) where he saith "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," which was not a saving knowledge, "they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end" of that man "is worse than the beginning" (Matt 25:1-4, etc.; Matt 7:22).