

Psalm 119:25-32 Daleth
The Gracious Granting of God's Law
...grant me thy law graciously – v. 29

In this fourth section of Psalm 119 we meet up immediately with a condition that must be overcome. *My soul cleaveth unto the dust*, the Psalmist says in v. 25. *My soul melteth for heaviness* – he says in v. 28. *Remove from me the way of lying* he says in v. 29. And that verse is very interesting for the way it reveals the Psalmist's knowledge of inbred sin. Notice that he doesn't pray that he would be removed from the way of lying as if to suggest that the way of lying was something outside of his soul that he didn't want to come near him nor did he want to go near it. No, rather, he prays *remove from me the way of lying*. Do you see how the way of lying was something within him that he desired to be taken away from him.

So we discover in this section the condition of the Psalmist being bowed down in humility – cleaving to the dust which says in effect that he feels so stuck, if you will, to this present evil world. He feels like the serpent in Gen. 3 with the weight of a curse upon him which forces him to slither in the dust like the serpent and never be able to rise above the dust. There is an awful weight upon him, like the weight of Christian's burden in Pilgrim's Progress that melts his soul and presses upon him with a heaviness that he doesn't have the strength to bear.

His statement in v. 32 indicates to us that he feels his heart toward God to be constricted. Listen to what he says in that verse *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart*. Before he will run in the way of God's commandments, he first needs for God to do something – he needs for God to enlarge his heart. He feels the need for a greater heart capacity for love to Christ and for love of holiness.

Does it sound like a familiar condition to you? This is one of the reasons that I love the book of Psalms. You find in this book such graphic descriptions of the condition of heart that the Christian experiences time and again. So you find this awful condition revealed in this section of the Psalm. You find also what is needed in order for the Psalmist to gain the victory over this condition.

He needs to be quickened or revived or made alive according to v. 25. He needs for his understanding to be deepened and expanded according to v. 27. He needs strength ministered to his soul – v. 28 and he needs his heart to be enlarged – v. 32. The Psalmist also recognizes what impact these things will have upon his life if they are granted by God. Notice what it says in v. 32 *I will run in the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart*.

To be able to run in the way of God's commandments is the desire of every Christian's heart. A man who can run is a man who has strength. A man who can run is a man who is not weighed down with cumbersome burdens. Isaiah 40 speaks to us of a man waiting on the Lord who mounts up with wings of an eagle and runs without getting weary. I can

remember many years ago now when my family was visiting LaCrosse, Wisconsin. A few of us made the hike up the road which leads to Granddads' Bluff. Granddads' bluff is a rock like structure that is elevated some 700 ft. above the city. You gain an incredible view of the city from the top of the bluff. It was quite a steep walk following the road up the bluff. But on the way down when we got not too far from the bottom I decided to run. I was running down hill. And running down hill was like running without becoming winded. I wasn't out of breath. I was running without growing weary.

Let us now transfer that concept into the realm of spiritual things. Oh that we might run in the way of the obedience of faith without growing weary. And that we might pursue after Christ himself to enjoy communion with him without being weighed down by the things of this world. This is what the Psalmist desired and this is what we as Christians desire. *I will run in the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

Now there is one thing in this section that I deliberately passed over in my analysis because I want to focus on it in particular. If we're going to gain the spiritual strength and the enlargement of heart that we need to follow after Christ with all our hearts then there is one other essential thing that we're going to need and that one thing is found in v. 29. Notice what it says at the end of the verse. *Remove from me the way of lying and grant me thy law graciously.*

Grant me thy law graciously. There are a lot of things that occur repetitively in this Psalm but this statement is not one of them. In fact, I don't know of a statement quite like this one in all the Bible. Here is the answer to both sides of the controversy between legalism and antinomianism – *grant me thy law graciously.* The mindset of some Christians could be expressed this way – *excuse me from thy law graciously that I may run my own way but not have to bear the consequences.* Still others would say – *grant me thy law* and would make no reference to grace.

I want to focus on this petition this morning in particular because of the uniqueness of the statement. I say uniqueness of the statement because while the statement itself may be unique, the concepts behind the statement are anything but unique. Law and grace run throughout the Bible and they run throughout the whole Bible – Old and New Testaments alike. Let's look at this petition, then, and note from it:

The Lessons We Can Learn from this Petition – *grant me thy law graciously.*

The first lesson I would draw your attention to is this:

I. The Nature of the Problem of Law and Grace

Grant me thy law graciously. We certainly see in this verse a distinction between law and grace as well as a connection between them. If you're going to understand and appreciate how the law functions and what grace means and how the two things work together then it becomes necessary for you to know and appreciate beyond any shadow of a doubt the nature of God's law and the meaning of God's grace. It is because of a misunderstanding

of the nature of the law that some Christians vehemently oppose it serving any function in the Christian's life.

These Christians are well aware of statements such as what Peter makes before the Jerusalem council in Acts 15:10-11: *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?* ¹¹*But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.*

They also know the statement that is recorded in John's gospel 1:17 *For the law was given by Moses, [but] grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* These two statements certainly call our attention to a distinction that exists between law and grace. And there is no denying such a distinction but when this distinction is magnified to the point that law is pitted against grace and grace pitted against law then all manner of confusion ensues.

It's interesting to note how often the issue of law vs. grace is addressed in the New Testament epistles. The church at Corinth thought they were magnifying God's grace by overlooking a terrible instance of flagrant immorality – an instance of immorality that was horrendous even by pagan Gentile standards. In their case grace had, in a sense, eliminated the law. But in the case of the Galatian church the very opposite was the case. The law was being magnified to the exclusion and denial of grace. And the result was a loss of liberty and a stronghold of bondage.

Paul makes reference in his first epistle to Timothy of those *desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor whereof they affirm* (1Tim. 1:7). So the problem of a lack of understanding of the nature of the law and the meaning of grace can be traced to the earliest days of the New Testament Church. And that problem continues right up to the present day in which we live.

How many Christians and indeed how many churches today can be characterized as churches in bondage or as churches that are so free and loose in their conduct that they bring reproach to the name of Christ? I think it could be argued that in either case such a church is in bondage. It's in bondage either to a misunderstanding of how the law of God applies or it's in bondage to the lusts of the flesh and the world. In both cases – in the case of the legalistic church and in the case of the free and loose church there can be found misunderstanding about the nature of the law and the meaning of grace.

I recently finished reading Iain Murray's biography of John Wesley. I've always wanted to read such a book because John Wesley has always been such a mysterious character to me. There are those that suggest that Wesley denied the doctrine of justification by faith. And he had some strange views of Christian perfectionism. He never thought that he himself had ever reached Christian perfection but he did believe that some Christians he knew had attained it.

Iain Murray does a great job of sorting through those complexities in Wesley's life and it appears that Wesley was for the most part guilty of double-speak. He would affirm the truth of justification but in another setting he would deny it. It turns out that the thing that contributed to Wesley's confusion was his attitude toward so many that named the name of

Christ but were anything but holy. If the doctrine of justification was the force behind their lack of holiness then the doctrine of justification by faith – and especially the doctrine that the imputed righteousness of Christ is the grounds for our acceptance with God – can't be right. That's the way Wesley reasoned. So he went back and forth between what he could see the Bible taught and what he saw that was so unimpressive in the lives of many Christians.

When you stop and think about it you should be impressed by the challenge to represent the doctrines you believe in by lives that are consistent with that doctrine. *Take heed unto thyself*, Paul writes in 1Tim. 4:16 *and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee*. Two things that must be taken heed to – yourself and your doctrine. You need to understand the gospel and how to live in light of the gospel.

Both of these things are envisioned by the Psalmist when he prays *Remove from me the way of lying*. Some other English versions translate the verse *Put false ways far from me* – the reference being to every deviant view of the truth and the gospel. Put lying and false views away from me – anything that clouds or obscures my vision to the glorious truth of the gospel of grace. Put false ways far from me *and grant me thy law graciously*.

So we see something of the nature of the problem between law and grace. Would you consider with me next:

II. The Solution to the Problem

Law and grace are, to be sure, two separate and distinct categories of God's revelation but our text reveals to us that there is also a compatibility between the two. *Grant to me thy law* the Psalmist prays.

Later in the Psalm the Psalmist expresses his love for God's law. Verse 97 reads *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day*. Verse 113 reads *I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love*. Verse 127 *Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold*.

Have you ever read such statements and wondered to yourself – why does the Psalmist love that which condemns him? Why does the Psalmist love that which he fails to measure up and that which he has transgressed countless times? How can he love that which calls with inflexible justice for his everlasting destruction?

Perhaps he's unaware of the truth that Peter speaks of before the Jerusalem council when Peter refers to the law as a yoke which neither he or his Fathers were able to bear? Was the Psalmist unaware of the heaviness of that yoke? Or was he so puffed up in pride as to think that he did measure up to perfection?

The law, I'm sure you know, has often times in the course of Jewish history been misunderstood. One of the things that Christ accomplishes in the Sermon on the Mount is to clarify many misconceptions about the law that were prevalent among the Jews while Christ walked in this world. You may recall from your reading of that sermon or from our

studies of that sermon the oft repeated formula Christ uses – *ye have heard...but I say unto you*.

The thing to note, however, is that in the course of those clarifications Christ made the yoke of the law heavier, not lighter. Mt. 5:21,22 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*

Mt. 5:27,28 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* Is this what the Psalmist loves? – a law that not only weighs actions, but words and motives?

The thing that must be ever kept in mind when it comes to the law is that the problem lies with us, not with the law itself. This is essentially Paul's argument about the law in Romans 6 and 7. Rom. 7:12 *Wherefore the law [is] holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.* This is certainly a contributing factor as to why the Psalmist loved the law. He saw that it was holy. He saw that it was just and good. He saw, you might say, the compatibility of the law with the perfect character of God.

For we know he writes in Rom. 7:14 *that the law is spiritual.* So it's holy, it's good, it's just and it's spiritual but here then is the problem as we go on to read *but I am carnal, sold under sin.* The law is holy but I am defiled. The law is just but I am not. The law is good but we are sinful. The law is spiritual but we are carnal.

How, then, can the Psalmist love the law? The solution to the seeming dilemma is found in the words of our text – *Grant me thy law* the Psalmist says but he wants it granted in a particular manner. *Grant me thy law graciously. Graciously teach me your law* another English version read. *Graciously grant me your law* still another versions reads. I like the translation of our AV because it seems to place an even stronger emphasis on how the Psalmist wanted the law granted to him – *Grant me thy law graciously.*

The question then becomes a matter of how this is to be done. How can God take something that amounts to a heavy yoke with inflexible justice and acts like a heavy weight to bring us down into everlasting condemnation? The solution is to be found in the person and work of Christ. And this is where, I believe, Covenant theology shines brightly. I referenced the Sermon on the Mount a moment ago – that sermon where Christ shows us how the law penetrates not only the actions but the words and thoughts and intents of the heart.

In that same sermon Christ declares the purpose for his coming into the world. Mt. 5:17 gives us the heart of Covenant theology and shows us how the way can be made for the law of God to be granted graciously. Mt 5:17 *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.* And as you see Christ as the second Adam, Christ who takes to himself all the obligations of the Covenant of works that the

first Adam failed to fulfill – as you see Christ providing to his Father the obedience not only in his life, but in his life and death in such a way as to satisfy the justice of the law completely – then you see how the law can be granted to you graciously.

You are no longer under the dread of the condemnation of that law for there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). You are no longer under the law as a covenant. The covenant obligations have all been met by Christ your Federal Head and your substitute.

How, then, can you view the law when it's granted graciously? You can see it in such a light that you love it as the Psalmist loved it. You love it because you see it as an expression of how man lived before he fell into sin. And you see it as an expression of how Christ lived when he walked in this world. And you see it as an expression of how you'll one day live when you're perfectly conformed to Christ in glory.

You can love it because you understand how it's been granted to you graciously. Grace, you know, speaks to you as the principle that governs God's every dealing with you. Paul says in Rom. 5:21 *That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.* I love that statement that says *grace reigns through righteousness.* What that means is that there is no incompatibility between righteousness and grace. Grace will always be the governing principle of God's dealings with you because grace is founded upon satisfied justice or the law being fulfilled.

The solution, then, between the seeming tension and I call it seeming tension because there's not really any tension there, it just seems like there's tension between law and grace based on our misunderstanding of their compatibility. The solution to this tension is for the law to be granted graciously. *Remove from me the way of lying and grant me thy law graciously.*

You dare not think that you would want the law granted to you any other way. To be granted the law apart from grace would be like handing a drowning man in the sea an anchor instead of a life preserver. Apart from grace the law brings you down – down the deepest hell. For that reason some Christians wrongfully view the law when they find deliverance from its condemning power.

The Psalmist loved the law and I believe our text shows us how he and how we can love the law. We love it when it's granted to us graciously. We love it when we see in it the character of our God. This is why it makes no sense to me to search, as some Christians do, for ways to abrogate the law of God through salvation. If all the law amounts to is a set of arbitrary rules invented by God to foist upon men then I can see why some Christians would want to contend for it being abrogated. But if we see in it – especially in the fulfillment of it the righteousness that Christ earned for us then we'll love it as the Psalmist loved it and we'll delight in our freedom to strive for it. We'll never be happy that our striving is enough. This is how God keeps us humble. The Psalmist certainly wasn't happy

with his own striving but he certainly recognized that the gracious granting of God's law was the domain of his freedom.

So we've seen the nature of the problem of law and grace. We've considered the solution to the problem. Would you think with me for a moment finally on:

III. The Impact of the Solution

Let me, if I may, make a connection here between the text and the previous section of the Psalm – Gimel. Keeping in mind that the gracious granting of God's law amounts to the granting of the gospel of Jesus Christ – if, in the words of v. 18 your eyes are opened to behold wondrous things out of God's law then among those wondrous things will be this connection between law and grace.

A gracious granting of God's law, you see, is a gracious granting of the sight of Christ fulfilling the law on your behalf. You see him dying in your place. You see him rising from the grave and ascending into heaven. And when you behold him in this capacity then the impact it will have on you will be that it will compel you to say that the Lord has dealt bountifully with your soul.

You will in the words of v. 26 gain strength that will lift you out of your heaviness. You will certainly gain integrity so that you become repulsed by the way of lying and will beg God to remove such a way far from you. Liars, you see, resemble the devil. He was the inventor of the lie. Those that have been granted the law of God graciously want to be conformed to Christ rather than be conformed to the devil.

The impact of this solution will also effect your resoluteness. You will say with conviction as the Psalmist does in v 30 *I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.* And in v. 32 *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

When the law is granted to you graciously and you see Christ as your law bearer fulfilling the law for you, paying the penalty of the broken law for you then your will certainly be enlarged toward God and toward the things of God and you won't simply limp along the path of life like a cripple who drags one of his feet along as he walks but you will run in the ways of God's commandments.

Nothing motivates a man to run, so much, as the power of gratitude. And so we begin to compile a number of petitions in this Psalm that we need to make our own. *O let me not wander from thy commandments* – v. 10; *Deal bountifully with thy servant* – v. 17; *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law* – v. 18; *Remove from me reproach and contempt* – v. 22; *Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously* – v. 29. This is not all of the petitions within the sections we've covered but it is a fairly large sample. And doesn't this Psalm, then, give us clear guidance in how to pray?

May we make it our prayer in the coming days that God will grant us his law graciously so that we will indeed run in the way of his commandments.