

The Attitude of Law and Grace

Ephesians 2:11-22

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh - who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands - ¹² that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” That’s the way Robert Frost began his famous poem, “Mending Wall.” **It’s a poem that some of us had to deal with when we were in English Literature.** It is a poem about two neighbors who go through the same ritual each spring, meeting at the wall to repair it - to refill the gaps that fallen stones have left and repair the damage done by hunters whose pursuit of their game has left the wall in disrepair. The neighbors have apparently done this for many years, yet it strikes the narrator in the poem to question just why it is they have the wall in the first place.

It is not an easy poem to read, but here it is: “And on a day we meet to walk the line and set the wall between us once again we keep the wall between us as we go. To each the boulders that have fallen to each. And some are loaves and some so nearly balls we have to use a spell to make them balance: ‘Stay where you are until our backs are turned!’ We wear our fingers tough with handling them. Oh, just another kind of outdoor game, one on a side. It comes to little more: There where it is we do not need the wall: He is all pine and I am apple orchard. My apple trees will never get across and eat the cones under his pines, I tell him. He only says, “Good fences make good neighbors.” Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder if I could put a notion in his head: “Why do they make good neighbors? Isn’t it where there are cows? Before I built a wall I’d ask to know what I was walling in or walling out, and to whom I was like to give offence. Something there is that doesn’t love a wall...”

The indication here is that the wall was built to keep each other’s cows from coming over and destroying their crops. But now they don’t have cows anymore that might stray onto the other’s property! **Just trees.** **So why is the wall there?** Hasn’t the time come that its purpose no longer exists? **Yet, it remains...why?** Because it’s always been there?

In our previous studies, we have seen that Ephesians is about the church. Paul is writing it to the church at Ephesus to be circulated among other area churches to show them how to be the church! He has emphasized the **blessings** that are found in Christ, the **power** that is found in Christ; and he has reminded these Christians where Christ has brought them from, **“you were dead in your sin.”** **But now he turns his attention to something that even our present-day church still struggles with – an attitude of separation.**

Look again at our text, “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men) remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the

promise, without hope and without God in the world.” Paul starts out this passage by saying, “Remember the *wall!*”

Remember Paul is talking to Gentiles, here...(like us) “Uncircumcised” was a typical & disrespectful term used by the Jews (“The Chosen”) to describe the Gentiles. They were heathens . . . clearly *not* the people of God! It would be hard to adequately describe for you in today’s terms the disdain that Jews had for Gentiles. **As wide as the divide has been between whites and blacks in America, I don’t think that quite does it justice.** As bitter the divide right now between some fundamentalist Moslems and Christians, that’s not the same thing either. The divide was racial, but extended far beyond race. **It was political, but extended far beyond politics.** It was religious, but extended far beyond religion. Other ancient Jewish writings refer to Gentiles as “fuel for the fires of hell.”

The wall of which Paul speaks is much, much greater than the wall that separated the two neighbors in Robert Frost’s poem. This wall was in the Jewish temple, separating the most important part of the temple - the Court of the Israelites - from the Court of the Gentiles. So everyone in the world who wasn’t Jewish, the Gentiles, were separated from the temple by a wall. **And on this wall were signs in both Greek and Latin warning that Gentiles were to go no further into the temple, under penalty of death!** The wall separated those with “*rightful*” access to God’s house of worship and those who were separated from worshipping God.

There is no doubt that in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he had this very wall in mind when he writes, “Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. The Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts, called you uncircumcised heathens. In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.”

To have a fair assessment of the attitude of the Law, one has to spend some time in the Old Testament. For instance, Leviticus 16:2

tells us that the Law *provided* the veil that cut the sinner off from the presence of God, “And the Lord said to Moses: Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.” Looking back, Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 3:6, “Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter (Law) but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” **Therefore the attitude of the Law is *death*.**

But what is the attitude of *grace*? Look at verse 13, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Listen to what we have been told in John 1:17, “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” In others words, the attitude of *grace* is the attitude of *Christ*.

To see the attitude of grace, I want share these three things with you: the *message* of grace, the *method* of grace, and the *motivation* of grace.

Look, first, at the *message* of grace. Jesus made this statement in John 6:63, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” **The *message* of Christ is the *message* of grace, and the *message* of Christ is the Word of God.** Paul put it this way in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

Second, look at the *method* of grace. Listen to the command of Jesus in Luke 14:23, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” **The *method* of Christ is the *method* of grace.** Jesus put it this way in Matthew 11:28, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Jesus gave this command in Matthew 28:18-20, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I

am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” The very last thing Jesus said before He left this earth is found in Acts 1:8-9, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

It is obvious from the words of Christ the church has to be two pronged. *First*, there is the maturing and growth of Christians. *Second*, we have to look outside the church in order to reach the lost.

If all we do in emphasize *soul winning*, there will very little spiritual growth and we will end up with a church filled with spiritual babies. If all we do is emphasize *Bible study* we will become lethargic theologians while the world goes to Hell in a hand basket. Therefore, the goal of the church must be two-fold.

The truth of the matter is that we are not doing very good on either of these fronts. More kinds are turning to “**crack cocaine**” than are turning to Christ. Since 911, the two major denominations in America have registered zero growth. And in addition to that statement, a recent study said that 47 per cent of regular church attenders have no idea what they actually believe concerning biblical doctrines.

Look, last of all, at the *motive of grace*. There is no better place to look for the motive of grace than John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Listen to Jesus’ statement in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” When asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus answered in Matthew 22:37-39, “Jesus said...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Listen to the words of Christ in John 15:12, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Remember, the *motive of Christ* is the *motive of grace*, and the motive of Christ is *love*.

Do you know what I have found out in my lifetime of ministry and experiences? When you love somebody rules are out. When you love somebody interruptions are the norm. **Do you remember when you first child was born?** I mean, Linda and I had no idea what we were doing, but the one thing we did know – we loved our baby. And when he would cry in the middle of the night, we did not get up because it was our duty to do so; we did it because of our love.

And if there is one thing I have learned about the ministry, it is this – the ministry is a life of interruptions. People don't have problems on my schedule, people don't get sick on my schedule, and people don't die on my schedule. The ministry is a life of interruptions.

That same thing is true in the life of Jesus. His life was a life of interruptions. When he tried to get away with His disciples to get a little rest, the crowds followed. **When He tried to get a little nap on the boat, He had to be awakened to still the storm.** In the middle of one of His sermons, He had to stop and feed 5,000 men plus women and children. But more than that, in the middle of His dying He had to stop and save a thief.

The newest term in ministry is "Target Group." And in one of our Staff Meetings, the question came up, "What is our Target Group?" And I really didn't have an answer. **And I went home and prayed about our "Target Group."** And a little later, I started thinking about where that idea came from, and I determined that it originated in the Corporate World. "Target Group" is a business term.

And I asked myself, "What was Jesus' Target Group?" **And this is what I found – prostitutes, outcasts, Tax Collectors, lepers, the sick, the crippled, those that simply did not fit the mold of organized religion.** These are the people that Jesus loved, and these are the people who interrupted His life.

The ultimate spiritual deception is that you love God but have no time for people. That is an oxymoron. The truth of the matter is

that you *can't* love God and *not* love people. And if you love you interruptions are the norm and not the exception.

So what is the problem? The problem is that we are trying to preach the *Gospel* of Christ without the *love* of Christ. And it cannot be done with any measure of spiritual success.

So, as Paul examine the attitude of grace, he draws this conclusion in verses 19-22, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

The attitude of the *Law* says, “Stone the sinner and throw him away.” But attitude of *grace* says, “Save the sinner and make him a son.” And John 1:12 says, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name.” Remember, the attitude of *Christ* is the attitude of *grace*.