Mixing Law And Grace

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Few of the multitudes who speak of salvation by grace, hold the doctrine in such a view as to exclude law and merit. The scheme of salvation which commands the admiration of the greatest part of what is called the Christian world, is that which represents an interest in the atonement to be procured by the condition of works. In opposition to all these, the Apostles declare salvation to be purely of grace, the free gift of God through Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul not only asserts salvation by grace, and not by human merit, but declares that salvation by grace and works, is a contradiction in terms. "And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise, grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more of grace: otherwise, work is no more work" (Romans 11:6). "For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Galatians 3:18).

This is so obvious a dictate of common sense, that it is strange to find any professing to believe the Scriptures, and mixing these incompatible elements. Yet, these things thought so inconsistent by the Apostle, have been found perfectly reconcilable by others; and what Paul looks upon as a contradiction, they have considered as a scheme, beautifully harmonising the attributes of God, and the moral agency of mankind. God is just and gracious in the atonement, while man is entitled to the benefit of this and the reward of eternal life, by his repentance and new obedience. This is the darling scheme of the wise and the unwise.

Grace And Merit Are Opposites

But let us see how the admirers of this popular scheme reconcile what Paul looked upon as a contradiction. If it is obvious to common sense, that grace and merit are irreconcilable, how can those who have not only common sense, but many that have such good sense and learning, be blind to the contradiction? It seems to me, that they hide the inconsistency from themselves, by viewing the grace of God and the merit of man, as not respecting the same things. Were it not for something of this nature, it would be impossible to attempt to reconcile things noticeably irreconcilable. The same thing that is given purely of favour, cannot also be given as wages for work. But they contrive to appropriate the grace of God to one thing, and the merit of man to another. The former respects the giving of Christ as a ransom for sinners; the latter respects the terms of obtaining an interest in this ransom. The atonement is all of grace, but human efforts must obtain an interest in that work.

God And Man Working Together

This surely is the spirit of their doctrine, who speak of the grace of God in

salvation, yet of man's being pardoned through the atonement for his repentance, and rewarded for his sincere obedience. The grace of God consists not in giving all freely through Christ, but in making salvation possible through Him, which was otherwise impossible, in giving a new and easier covenant, which requires not perfect but sincere obedience. This they call a milder law, the gospel covenant, etc.. In this view, also, some speak of faith itself, as if God, on account of the excellent disposition which it is supposed to manifest, accepts it in lieu of sinless obedience to His law. They seem to have the same view of God's grace, as they would of that of a rich man, who, to encourage industry among the poor, would engage to give them wages, in value much above their work. While others give but a shilling a day, he gives five. He is gracious, then, in giving the poor so good a bargain; they merit their wages, because they have performed a work. But it is obvious that when the Scriptures speak of God's grace, and the opposition of grace and works, they refer to the whole scheme of salvation, and oppose grace to work with respect to the same points. In Galatians 3:18, where Paul asserts the inconsistency of law and promise, he is speaking against the doctrine of those who made the observance of law necessary to salvation, as well as faith in the death of Christ. In Romans 11:6, it is not only the salvation of sinners that is represented as of grace, but the election of them as of grace.

The Gospel Is All Of Grace

The heirs of life are represented as chosen, not on account of works that they should do, but altogether out of grace. If so, works of no kind can ever be represented consistently with Scripture as conditions of salvation. But all the ingenuity of all the learned advocates of this heterogeneous scheme, has never been able either to harmonise it with the scriptures, or even with itself. If God requires any conditions on the part of sinners, it is impossible that salvation is of grace. However inconsiderable and easy such conditions may be, however short of the value of what is gained, still, when they are performed, they are work, and therefore contrary to grace. When they have been performed, they give ground to glory. If in themselves they are of no value, then they who have them not, are not inferior in moral worth to those who possess them; consequently they are of no value. If, though of no value in themselves, they are valuable, as commanded by God, then they who possess them, offer some value to God for their salvation. But if these conditions are valuable in themselves, as is generally supposed by the advocates of this scheme, then, according to their value, do they afford God a price for what He gives. If faith, repentance, sincere obedience, are the work of man, or the productions of man's own efforts, then his salvation is the fruit of his own labour. If one perishes, because he does not comply with these terms, and another is saved on account of them, then salvation is not of grace, but by human merit! The man who is saved may glory in the success of his efforts. He cannot be said to be saved by grace. He has given value for what he has received; and although it is not full value, it is all that is thought reasonable in his bankrupt circumstances to require of him. God then still demands of him all the debt which he is able to pay. Is this a salvation by grace? If faith, repentance, sincere obedience, are spoken of as

the gift of God, then it is absurd in that view of them, to consider them as conditions on the part of man. In this view, the man who receives them has no more merit than the man who receives them not. If through faith; repentance, and sincere obedience, are the gift of God, but are given to one rather than another, on account of complying with some previous conditions, it is only removing merit a little farther back, and salvation is the reward of these previous conditions.

Free Unconditional Grace

On the other hand, if it can be said that salvation is of grace, that eternal life is the gift of God, then it is absurd and contradictory to suppose that the performance of anything is required on the part of man. It cannot be grace that requires—that will not give without something in return. It cannot be a gift that requires a purchase before it is communicated. No conditions on the part of the sinner can exist in a free salvation. It is of faith that it might be by grace. The pride of man is humbled in the doctrine of the cross. The virtuous sage is able to offer to God, for his salvation, nothing more than the abandoned profligate. If they believe the gospel; they both alike are changed by its power; they repent, are born again, and perform good works.

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