

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” ... “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” (John 14.15, 21 NASB)

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” (John 15.10 NASB)

Recently, I was on I-85 traveling from Charlotte, NC, returning to our previous home in Richmond, VA. Believe it or not, I try to follow the posted speed limit, especially when I am on interstate highways. In fact, if the limit is posted at 70 mph, I will set my cruise control on 65 mph, since the danger level increases unacceptably, at least for me. If someone else makes a foolish move, which seems to be more the norm these days, there may not be enough time to react defensively. Besides, although it may not be fashionable among drivers these days, I try to stay within the law when I drive (at least most of the time), which actually deals with the point I wish to make in this issue.

Well, on this particular day, the stretch of highway that I was on had a posted speed of 65 mph, which is the speed I set on my cruise control. The traffic was light and the road was three lanes wide. I was in the far right lane as a medium-sized truck came along my left side in the middle lane. He stayed close to me for a while and then moved into my lane. As he passed, I could smell rubber burning. Of course, my first thought was to wonder if my car had a problem, but it had just received its full maintenance service (the kind of service that when you are handed the bill, you think you are buying the car all over again), so I put the thought from my mind. At that time, the truck was still rather close to me, but then the posted speed limit dropped to 55 mph. Few people actually lower their speed that much on interstates, but I do and I did. With my lowered speed, the truck, whose driver obviously wanted to keep up his speed, moved about a half mile in front of me. Just as I was slowing and he was speeding away, I heard this real loud boom and observed the truck’s tire literally exploding in front of me. I was amazed at the explosive force. I immediately slowed even more and moved into the lane farthest away from the truck and the large chunks of tire that were flying into the road, especially the lane in which I had been traveling.

If the tire had blown a few minutes (perhaps seconds) earlier when I first smelled the rubber burning, only the Lord knows what would have happened to me and my car. The force of the exploding tire could have forced me off the road or the large chunks of tire could have hit my car directly. A direct hit on my windshield could have resulted in serious injury to me personally. But there was another possibility; if I had not lowered my speed as the law commanded, there is absolutely no doubt that I would have been very close to the truck and the flying debris. Simply, I have no doubt that I would not be having a good day today, because I would either be dealing with insurance companies, or even worse, I would be in some hospital.

As this event unfolded, I praised the Lord for His grace and for protecting me and my car from danger. But there is more, for immediately I saw a spiritual lesson in this experience. I was under grace because I was following the law.

You see, many believers today think that the law of God no longer applies. After all, doesn't Paul tell us that we are not under the law but under grace (Romans 6.14-15)? Yes, he did, but what did he mean? Some people think that the law of God has been dissolved and that so-called Christians don't have to be concerned with their deportment (behavior). Paul and the other apostles never told others to go out and sin at will; on the contrary, they exhorted them, and us, to live godly and holy lives, free from sin. When we live in this fashion, we are under grace.

Now, let us not confuse the issue with our being born from above. When we first believe, we are saved by grace through faith, or as Paul testified, when the grace of our Lord overwhelms, with faith and love in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1.14 CV), we are saved. It is the grace and the faith of the Son of God that saves us, and this salvation is a gift from God that cannot be taken away. Immortality awaits all who are saved by grace through faith, not all at the same time but all eventually, either in the first or second resurrection. This is our expectation. Consequently, the law of God does not justify anyone.

However, this does not mean that once we are justified, we ignore God's divine laws. How else are we to know how to live righteously while in bodies of death unless we know God's righteous demands that are to mold or shape our deportment? Simply, there must be some benchmarks or, if you will, rules that are to govern our lives in the Lord. As Paul wrote, **if we live by the spirit, then let us also walk by the spirit** (Galatians 5.25 NASB). Do we honestly think that the spirit of God is going to lead us to sin and not place some righteous demands on our actions? Of course not!

This is part of the point that Paul made in his Romans epistle. The law does not save us, only grace can do that, but this does not give us a license to sin, which, by the way, is licentiousness. Jude exhorts us to **contend for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ** (Jude 3-4 NASB). Grace can be turned into licentiousness, which means "exceeding permitted limits," and the result is ungodliness, character unlike God. May it never be that we sin because we are under grace and end up denying our Master and Lord!

Let me state it more emphatically using the definition above; there are limits in the life of a child of God, and these limits are the divine laws of God, or, as our Lord Jesus stated, they are His commandments (injunctions, prescriptions). His commandments are God's law. If we love Him, we will keep His commandments. But what happens when we willfully sin and break His commandments? We are no longer under grace; we are under the law and its consequences (judgments). Why? Because the law is the standard by which to judge sin. How else are we to know what sin is apart from the law? What standard or benchmark is to be applied by the righteous Judge of all? It is the law of God.

This leads back to the illustration that I started with; when I was following the law by not speeding, I was under grace. And what happened? I did not suffer any consequences resulting from the exploding tire and, by the way, the actions of the trucker who was a lawbreaker. But what if I had not lowered my speed and continued to keep pace with the truck? I would have been a lawbreaker, and I could have suffered along with the other lawbreaker, except the consequences might have been more severe for me. After all, the trucker ended up on the side of the road with his life and a flat tire that can be fixed. My car could have received serious damage from the flying debris that exploded into the air while the truck sped along at 65 mph or greater. I could have ended up in a ditch along the road with worse results; not to forget that I could have been seriously hurt or even killed.

What is the lesson? Thank God for the grace of God that saves so that one day we might put off mortality and put on immortality. But also, thank God for His grace for all who set their hearts to follow God's law. Let us keep the Lord's commands and remain under grace! Let us not exceed the limits set by our Lord's commands. Let us walk by the spirit according to the grace of God!