

The Whole Christ

By Sinclair Ferguson

Lesson 5: The Order of Grace

There are many facets to the error of legalism. One of the ways in which legalism creeps into our theology is when we get the _____ of the gospel wrong. The *ordo salutis* (the order of salvation) is the classic term that is used to discuss the logic of the gospel.

“Thomas Boston was particularly burdened by the way in which repentance was being given not only a logical but a chronological priority over faith in the ordo salutis...Repentance does not precede faith in an individual’s coming to Christ.”

Discussing the *ordo salutis* Ferguson writes,

“In its best formulations its intention was to lay bare the internal logic and interrelations of the various aspects of this application, not to delineate a temporal process in which the individual passed from one stage to another.”

When thinking of the *ordo salutis* sometimes we think of the image of a _____ (we even use this picture as we think about Paul’s statement in Romans 8). This image, while being helpful, can have a negative impact on our theology.

“One repercussion of this has been a way in which the various aspects of redemption, viewed as individual links in the chain, follow one another, and each in turn precede the next. This then had a tendency to shift the perspective from the logical to the chronological and especially to transfer focus from Christ to the specific benefits of the gospel.”

The whole concept of _____ also needs to be understood correctly so that we do not slip into a form of legalism. During the Middle Ages the idea of repentance became seen as doing things to make up for the sin that a person committed.

“The biblical idea of repentance therefore became associated with, if not limited to, specific concrete acts that a priest could prescribe for sin as part of the sacramental system.”

This understanding of repentance saw it as a way to receive more _____ from God after you had made shipwreck of your salvation by sin. This form of penance was seen as a way to “earn” God’s grace so that one could eventually arrive at the place of full justification. The Reformers began to see that repentance/penance is not about doing things after we sin to get back into God’s good graces. This is why repentance is often referred to as an “evangelical grace” (LBC 15.3, WCF 15.1)

“Repentance is not a discrete external act; it is the turning round of the whole life in faith in Christ...Repentance then is not the punctiliar decision of a moment but a radical heart transformation that reverses the whole direction of life.”

“Only within the context of faith taking hold of Christ in whom we find the grace of God to us can repentance be evangelical.”

In gospel logic faith comes first. Repentance flows from faith. In order to repent you must first _____ that God accepts and desires your repentance (faith). Faith without repentance is false. Repentance without faith is legalism.

“While we cannot divide faith and repentance, we do distinguish them carefully...Christ should be presented in all the fullness of His person and work; faith then directly grasps the mercy of God in Him, and as it does so the life of repentance is inaugurated as its fruit.”

“Repentance can never be said to precede faith. It cannot take place outside of the context of faith...both faith and repentance are so essential to conversion that one cannot exist apart from the other, and, as a consequence, the one may be used where both are intended...Faith will always be penitent; repentance will always be believing if genuine.”

Ferguson then looks again at the parable of the prodigal son to show that the father is full of grace and the returning son does “not need to ‘repent enough’ to be accepted.” But the stress or the ultimate purpose of this parable was to focus on the actions and attitudes of the son who _____ at home. The son who stayed at home gets mad at the gracious father.

“What is particularly illuminating is that we are given the impression that only in the context of a lavish display of grace did the hidden poison of the elder brother’s legalistic disposition fully manifest itself...the spirit of the elder brother, the legalist, is more likely to be found near the father’s house than in the pig farm-or in concrete terms, in the congregation and among faithful.”

What we need is to understand that we are justified by _____ alone. We are justified by God alone.

“Grace therefore eliminates boasting; it suffocates boasting; it silences any and all negotiations about our contribution before they can even begin. By definition we cannot ‘qualify’ for grace in any way, by any means, or through any action. Thus it is understanding God’s grace-that is to say, understanding God Himself-that demolishes legalism. Grace highlights legalism’s bankruptcy and shows that it is not only useless; it is pointless; its life breath is smothered out of it.”

The law was not given by God so that we might earn our way into the _____ of _____. God saves His people, and His people respond by striving to walk in obedience.

“Thus the basic structure at Sinai echoed the structure of life in Eden: God is gracious; He acts sovereignly and gives graciously to His people. In response to His grace His people desire to please Him, obey Him, and never grieve Him.”

The law is not to be only seen as a way to have our sin _____. It must also be seen as the words of a gracious and kind Father to us.

“If we come to think of God as one whose total focus is on exposing our sin, we will become too shortsighted to see His grace...For unless we are persuaded that God has shown grace in His law as well as in His Son, all we will hear and see at Sinai is thunder and lightning.”

Chapter 2-The Law of Faith (the Covenant of Grace)

Confusion as to how the Old Covenant relates to the New Covenant takes up the next session of the discussion. Antinomista thought that the Jews were under a “_____” covenant of law and grace. Evangelista must clarify.

Evan. Truly the opposition between the Jews’ covenant of grace and ours was chiefly of their own making. They should have been driven to Christ by the law; but they expected life in obedience to it, and this was their great error and mistake.”

Antinomista then changes to discuss how many in London are carried away by a _____ zeal thinking that they can be saved by their works. Evangelista responds:

Evan. Alas! There are thousands in the world that make a Christ of their works; and here is their undoing. They look for righteousness and acceptance more in the precept than in the promise, in the law than in the gospel, in working than in believing...Many poor ignorant souls...when wounded, they must run to the salve of duties, and stream of performances, and neglect Christ...And there is some touch of this in us all.”