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Creation, the Law, Faith, and Grace From the Book of Romans

By Phillip Johnson

Creation

The book of Romans explains so much about creation and the nature of man and reality as we know it. The Spirit quickly has Paul record this fact about the beginning:

For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, *so that they are without excuse.* (Romans 1:20)

From the very beginning of time (the instant time was created), t=0, God revealed himself and continued doing so throughout history. He had an intimate relationship with Adam and Eve until sin entered the world; then because of sin, the relationship was broken, and God did not talk to men as he did at the beginning. But in the very Creation itself, he made himself known.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (Romans 5:12–13)

It was not long after creation that the fall occurred. We know that it was less than 130 years, probably much less because Seth was born when Adam was 130 years old and Cain had already killed his brother Abel before Seth was born. The fall and eventual curse changed the created universe in ways we do not even fully know. What was perfect was now corrupted. We cannot even imagine perfection, having been born in corruption.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole crea-

tion groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:18–23)

When Jesus returns the creation will be new again. Peter gives us insight into the creation at the end times:

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by his word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to his promise we are

looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. (II Peter 3:3-13)

Do not confuse what Peter is saying here about the original creation and the new heavens and new earth, "...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." That is not a reference to the original creation days. It shows the uniqueness of the timing of Christ's return. Since God exists at all points in time, he created time at the beginning, he already sees and knows all events, past, present and future (I John 3:20).

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, *nor any other created thing* will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Creation of the physical universe is a trinity of trinities:

- Time: past, present and future
- Space: length, height and depth
- Matter: Matter invariably is equivalent to energy, and energy is invariably manifested in motion, and motion invariably produces phenomena.

The Law

There are many kinds of laws: spiritual laws, God's laws, natural or physical laws, laws of morality, laws of men, behavioral laws and universal laws. The two most important laws are: Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and soul and love your neighbor as yourself. Fairly simple to remember, only sixteen words. Jesus said these two summed up the whole law.

But why was the law given? The Scriptures declare that all have sinned and fallen short God's glory (Romans 3:23). James tells us that if you break one part of the law you are guilty and a transgressor of the whole law (James 2:10). Only Jesus was born without sin, and only he was able to keep the Law.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be closed and *all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.* (Romans 3:19-20)

No man has a perfect moral compass built in, we are conceived in sin so it is impossible for anyone to be morally pure. Whatever a person thinks in their heart is what is considered moral and normal. The law was given to show us what should be our normal, to show us how far we had fallen from what God had created in us.

Why the law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. (Galatians 3:19)

The law was also given for our well being, to point us to the promised one. The promised one fulfilled the law!

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. *Therefore the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.* For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:21-26)

The Law was given for our benefit and well-being. It gives us an absolute moral compass whereby we can know absolutely right and wrong. We are not dependent on society or our own thinking to know what is proper and correct. It convicts us of our failures to meet God's standards and our need for someone to pay the debt we owe and cannot pay ourselves, even by giving our lives. The only acceptable sacrifice had to be perfect and without blemish. The law points us to Jesus Christ, our Savior!

How do we fulfill the law being born of the Spirit?

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; *for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.* For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; *therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.* (Romans 13:8-10)

Faith and Grace

It appears that people who come to know Jesus have a few things in common concerning the validity of that relationship. First they must be chosen by God.

For many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14).

For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brethren; and the-

se whom he predestined, he also called; and these whom he called, he also justified; and these whom he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30)

There must be repentance, a turning away from what we want to what God wants. Repenting implies a 180-degree turn, turning away from sin to God.

Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and *that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations*, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:46–47)

Without a doubt, everyone who belongs to Christ has the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *him* so that we may also be glorified with *him*. (Romans 8:16–17)

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, *who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*. (Romans 8:1–4)

He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1 John 5:12)

Romans also teaches us that man is justified by faith apart from works of the law (3:28). Because of God's grace it is possible for men to have faith. Grace is a gift of God and faith is also a gift from him. All good and perfect gifts come from above. Faith and grace go hand in hand.

For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made you") in the presence of him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. (Romans 4:16–17)

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

through whom also we have obtained our introduction by *faith into this grace* in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1–2)

Ephesians clearly states the relationship between grace and faith:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

Some wonderful promises are recorded in the book of Romans. For example:

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, *waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body*. (Romans 8:23)

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26–27)

He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him over for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is he who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Romans 8:32–35)

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:5–6)

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13) ❧

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, February 14, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 237

Topic: Creation and the Gospel in the Book of Romans. We will be looking at creation and history described in Romans as well as the fall of man and the characteristics of man because of the fall. Our discussion will cover the gospel and what the law is, why the law was given to man, and why the law is unable to save man. Finally, the relationship between faith and grace will be examined.