

Galatians 2:20 (Alexander Hume Rule) 87668

Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule Volume 1, Man's Condition; and What Is the Remedy? Part 5

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We have already remarked that legalism says: "You must be made perfect by the flesh under the law," for the law addresses itself to man as in the flesh.

The early Judaizers insisted on circumcision in order to salvation. They said: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Modern law teachers say we have nothing to do with the "ceremonial law," but we are under the "moral law," and must keep it, if not for justification, at least as a "rule of life."

Now the law was a "rule of life" to the Jew, or to man as in the flesh, when he stood responsible before God on that ground. But man failed under this rule, as in everything else; and, if he was to be saved at all, it must be by grace, through faith, and even that the gift of God.

But we have seen that God's salvation takes man out of that standing altogether, and puts him in Christ, and in the Spirit. This is a new standing and state altogether, where there is no flesh, and where the law can have nothing to say. The flesh, as to its standing, came to an end before God at the cross; and if you are in Christ Jesus risen from the dead, that is not the standing of a natural man in the flesh, even though the flesh be still in you.

In Christ all is a new creation. There is nothing of the old thing there at all. And if you will have a law, the new life has its own law — "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" — forming, characterizing and governing the new man. The new life has its source and flowing stream in the Spirit; and in the Spirit in this connection is called "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2).

As to the old man, we are crucified with Christ, that the body of sin should be annulled, that "henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6). "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). What a change! The sentence of death executed, yet the believer lives! But it is no longer the old life. He lives, but it is Christ — a risen, glorified Christ — who lives in him. Christ is his life.

Does this need an external law imposed to command, or to prohibit, pronouncing a curse on disobedience? It would be to deny the true character of this life; to put life in Christ on a level with the old man; and to put Christ on a level with sinful flesh.

But I have the flesh in me: Do I not need the law to regulate that, to direct it in what is good, and to restrain it from evil? No. God's Word says the mind of the flesh is not subject to the law, and cannot be; and the only effect of applying the law is to provoke the evil that is there. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (Rom. 7:7-8). Such is the effect of the law on the flesh. It only provokes it. This, then, is not the remedy.

I repeat, there is no remedy for the flesh but death; "I am crucified with Christ." You do not apply a law to a dead man. So, if we account ourselves dead with Christ, law is not needed to restrain the evil of the flesh. If we hold ourselves dead, the flesh does not act. What then? "Christ liveth in me." And as we have seen, this life has its own law, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2).

What, then, is the mode of this life? "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). The mode of its subsistence is by faith of the Son of God. It is not the eye turned inwardly on self, to find something there answering to the demands of an external law; but the eye of faith is lifted upward to Christ, as the One in whom, and by whom we live. By faith we live of His life, and this in the power of the Spirit who dwells in us, and is the Spirit of life in Christ. It is "by faith of the Son of God," faith which takes its character from Him as an object, through the operation of the Spirit who opens the eyes of our hearts to behold Him, the One "altogether lovely"; One who has loved us, and given Himself for us, redeemed us from death and judgment, and brought us to God, and into His own blessed relationship with the Father, as well as eternal union with Himself; who, moreover, by the Spirit reveals Himself in our hearts, producing in us His own affections and desires and thoughts, so that we live of what He is, as thus revealed to faith.

Who can overestimate the importance of understanding this clearly? Not as a doctrine merely, but as a living reality, known experimentally in the soul, as it was with him who said, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). It is just thus that real power is known and realized in the Christian life, because it brings Christ into everything, and all the power of the Spirit, who delights in Christ, and whose mission is to glorify Christ, and take His things, and show them unto us.

And it is just this mode of life that the enemy hates, and seeks to annul by corrupting the minds of God's people "from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). It may be in a very pious way that he comes; as "an angel of light," it may be, and seeks to impose a law on those who are in Christ; but just in the measure in which this is done, the cross is denied, and Christ and the Spirit are set aside. For if you bring in the law, you set up the flesh again as responsible before God. It is no more grace; faith as a principle of relationship with God is given up; Christ has died in vain; and the liberty of the Spirit is unknown. Such is the sorrowful effect of law teaching upon souls who fall under its power. The whole system from beginning to end is destructive to Christianity and the truth of the gospel.

One who is under the law measures God's thoughts and feelings about himself by his own faithfulness to the law's requirements. If he is faithful, God will think well of him; if unfaithful, God will think ill of him. Thus, if he is honest, he can only be miserable, since he must ever

realize that he comes short of the law's requirements. Under grace it is quite otherwise. Instead of God's state and feelings toward us being the result of our state toward Him, our state and feelings toward Him are the result of His state toward us as revealed in Christ. God has revealed Himself in absolute grace. He has given Jesus, His eternal Son, as a Savior; delivered Him up for our offenses, and raised Him again for our justification; chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and accepted us in the Beloved. God has thus revealed Himself in grace, when there was not one redeeming feature in man's condition or character; when he had been proved lawless, a transgressor, a God hater, a murderer of God's Son. According to this grace, God has taken man up to bring him into eternal glory and blessedness with Himself, through the death and resurrection of Christ. It is grace from first to last, grace superabounding over man's sin, and grace reigning through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus the believer has a constant, unfailing resource in God as revealed in Christ, without being thrown back on his own resources under law.

Let it be remarked, too, that when God is not thus known, all kinds of human appliances are resorted to in connection with matters of salvation, service and worship. In fact, salvation comes to depend on faithfulness in going through mere routines of service, and forms of worship, instead of service and worship flowing out of the knowledge of a present and eternal salvation founded on Christ and His finished work, together with the knowledge of our relationship with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the fruit of accomplished redemption.

When redemption is known, and our place in Christ, and the liberty of the Spirit, these human appliances are not needed. There is conscious acceptance with God; we enjoy the place of children with the Father; and if it is a question of drawing near to God as worshipers, as priests, we have boldness to enter the holiest in virtue of the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10). But when these are not known, legal ordinances are put in the place of Christ, and cumbersome rules of worship are introduced for the guidance of the flesh, while a human system of ministry or priesthood is set up between God and His people, as if God could only be approached through a kind of priestly order. This is practically setting up Judaism again, and denying the effect of the atoning death of the Son of God, which has rent the veil, and given the believer access to God without a veil. Is it only of minor importance? The apostle calls it "another [or different] gospel," and anathematizes its propagators, even though it were himself, or an angel from heaven. How serious, then, for any one to trench upon the simplicity and purity of the gospel!

The gospel of Jesus Christ brings men to God in all the value of Christ's atoning sacrifice, and in all the acceptableness of His blessed Person, in perfect and eternal peace; God's love is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit which is given; God's presence is enjoyed in the soul; and Christ, in the power of the Spirit, leads the saints in priestly service in the sanctuary of God's unveiled presence. Why then impose rules for the flesh, or institute a priestly order to stand between the people and God? The flesh, having been condemned in the cross, can have no place in these things; and eternal redemption through the blood of Christ having been brought in, the saints are all priests, "a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5), and have access into the holiest of all, where they have an High Priest over them, Jesus the Son of God, who raises the censer on their behalf, and presents their worship as incense before God, according to the value of His own Person and work. But how little of all this is known in these days! All around us we see magnificent buildings for worship, gorgeously furnished, splendid rituals, priestly orders, and imposing services rendered according to human rules; and all this for the flesh. Alas! alas! Where does all this come from? Is it found in the Word of God, or in connection with Christianity as found there? We are compelled to answer, No. The enemy has brought it in. It is a legal system for the flesh, a system of works which practically replaces faith, and does away with grace. The gospel is corrupted, or set aside altogether; Christ and His blessed work are replaced by fleshly ordinances; and the place and functions of the Holy Spirit are usurped by priestly orders, or human leaders.

Is it any wonder that the apostle appealed to the saints in such words as these? "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Gal. 3:1).

But do you ask, "What is the remedy?" Again I must answer, THE CROSS. It is only the flesh that desires these things, and if God's judgment of the flesh in the cross of His Son is bowed to, it will give deliverance from all that the flesh feeds on and lives in. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them" (Gal. 6:14-16).

And now, reader, have you tasted the blessedness of that redemption which brings a poor vile sinner to God, through faith in Jesus Christ, and sets him in His presence in conscious peace and liberty as a son and heir, not in Adam, but in Christ, not in the flesh, but in the Spirit? If so, let me with the apostle entreat you to "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:1,13,16,25).

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