

## The Wednesday Word, June 8, 2011: Law and Terrors Versus the Cross

We believe in the Law of God, but the Law can save no one. Why then do so many of our new breed of street evangelists major on law and not gospel? The Law on its best day is anaemic by comparison to the preaching of Christ Crucified. Now, don't think for a moment that I'm against street preaching, I've done plenty of it myself, but there's a new breed out there and although they say we are saved by grace, some of them have a list of DOs and DON'Ts to give us before we are qualified to receive the gospel.

Consider this, when we tell people to give their hearts to Jesus we are preaching law to them. We are giving them the legalistic formula of "put something in and you'll get something out." In this case it's give something (your heart) and you'll get something back (salvation). But this is gospel preaching in full throttle reverse. Salvation is a gift---we don't give something to God to get a gift! We accept the free gift of salvation receiving, by faith, God's gift, Jesus himself. We do not give Him anything---otherwise it is not grace. Notice that the scriptures tell us that God is the giver, Romans 8:32 says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" It is after we are saved that we continue to give Him our hearts, not because of a demand to do so in order to gain salvation, but because of the response to gospel love, not law.

Law can show us our terrible need, but it cannot save. Even for the believer, the preaching of the law will not cause us to grow the slightest bit in grace. Spurgeon said, "I have often striven to overcome sin by the thought of the punishment attached to it, but I have very seldom found myself in a frame of mind in which my heart would receive that reason. I believe that to the most of us the terrors of the law, although they ought to be exceedingly terrible, have but little power to check us from sin." (CHS: Sermon 208: Righteous Hatred)

As the old hymn says,

"Law and terrors do but harden;  
All the while they work alone."

But what about repentance, don't we command people to repent and then believe? The word repentance signifies, in the Greek, "a change of mind;" It's a great truth and we should never be afraid to tell people about this great subject. However, this word 'repentance' in the preaching of some is more associated with law than with gospel.

So let's ask, does repentance come through the law or through the gospel? According to some, we must first get repentance and then we are qualified to believe the gospel. But is this true? If that is the truth of the matter it means that salvation comes through law and not by grace for there is something we must do first in order to qualify for grace.

When repentance is placed before faith, as a qualification for faith, the gospel has been plundered. Faith and repentance go together, they are related (Acts 20:21), but we dare not make the mistake of insisting that repentance in any sense is a preliminary qualification for faith. "It must be reckoned a settled point," says Calvin, *"that repentance not only immediately follows upon faith, but springs out of it..."* (Institutes, Book III, chapt, 3, sect 1). Justifying faith is the means of true repentance not vice versa.

God asks us for nothing in return for salvation, not even our repentance. He is the giver we are receivers. Listen again to Romans 8:32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

He gives, we receive.

And that's the Gospel Truth