



Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
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Welcome to the September edition of the Grace Church newsletter.
Send any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter to
secretary@gracecongregational.org





From the Pastor's Desk

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Romans 7:7

Back in the springtime I addressed the topic of the role of God's law in our lives as Christians. As you perhaps have noticed in our study of Paul's Epistle to the Romans his reference to the Law rises to the surface on numerous occasions. As a former Pharisee, he of all the Apostles, was most concerned that we do not depend on our obedience to the Law to provide our justification. But then, that might lead us to believe that the Law is of no value for us as Christians today, and, for that matter, is actually detrimental to our faith. After all, we are saved by grace and not by works, aren't we?

This apparent conflict between Law and grace in the New Testament has led many to believe that God has changed, that the Old Testament is about a God of Law and judgment while the New Testament is about grace and love. What do we do then with Paul words, *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.* in Romans 7:12? or Jesus' words at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount, *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law...but to fulfill [it].* (Mt. 5:17)

What do we think of when we mention the Law of God? The first thing is most likely the Ten Commandments. After that, we probably think of all the rules and regulations listed in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Which of those laws apply to us as Christians and which ones don't?

When we think of the Law in the Old Testament we need to think of its three dimensions- moral, civil, and ceremonial. The Ten Commandments is most clearly representative of God's moral law, and, as such expresses God's will for all mankind as image bearers of God. The basic principles of this law were printed on the human heart as Paul reminds us in Romans 2:14-15. Sinclair Ferguson in a footnote in his book, *Devoted to God*, writes, *...when we remove the Ten Commandments from personal and civil life and from the basic nurturing values of family, our society requires to make more, not less laws in order to cope with the disorder that flows from indifference to the basic undergirding principles of well-ordered life.* (p. 172) It is certainly easy to see that in western society today. He continues, *...abandoning the Ten Commandments never comes cheaply for a society.*

Well, what do we do with all those laws in the Old Testament we call civil or ceremonial? What we find in the ceremonial law is basically a liturgy governing how we should approach God. It is there for illustration purposes to prepare us for the gospel (similar to the way in which the Lord's Supper illustrates for us the gospel today). The civil law it seems was intended to apply the foundational principles of the moral law of God to the immediate context of God's people at any given time, whether it was when they were marching through the wilderness or living in the land. That said, we should not be too quick to abandon the value of the Law today or count it as antithetical to grace for salvation.

I hope all this doesn't sound too academic. There really is application for us as Christians today. What I have observed is that there is a tendency for Christians in different eras to pendulum swing between the two poles of legalism or license. The legalist, like the Pharisee, assumes that God will be happiest when we exercise enough will power to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. So we develop extra arbitrary standards, but in doing so miss real the point of God's law, that is the gospel. The antinomian ("against law") on the other hand resents the moral straightjacket of the legalist and throws the baby out with the bathwater. "I have accepted Jesus, so I'm forgiven. Therefore it doesn't matter how I live."

Jesus told us he had come not to abolish the Law...but to fulfill it. He fulfilled the requirements of the Law by his perfect life, but also by going to the cross for us. But he also fulfills the Law in us through his Spirit. He takes the Law, originally written on tablets of stone, and writes it on our hearts by his Spirit as we read in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

"I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8)

Pastor Tom Bridgman



IT'S TIME FOR OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD!

Would you like to bring the hope of the Gospel to children and families around the world in the form of a simple gift?

Then get packing!

-Pack a shoebox by yourself or with a friend. (Decorative boxes are available at the church.) Decide on a gender and age and fill a box with toys, school supplies, toiletries, and other things a child would love.

OR

-Purchase individual items that can go into a box and bring them to the church.

(Please consult the list of gift suggestions and items to avoid. Guidelines are available at <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/what-goes-in-my-shoebox-suggestions/>

)

-If you can't get out to shop you can **build a box online** at: <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/operation->

National Collection Week, is November 12-19.

People from around the county will be bringing over a thousand shoeboxes to our church!

Our ministry as a Drop-Off Location is a team effort.

That means we need you on the team to:

- ⇒ Greet those who come through our doors and help carry in their donated boxes
- ⇒ Bake cookies to offer our guests
- ⇒ Keep accurate records of the number of boxes brought in each day, and from whom
- ⇒ Pack the shoeboxes into cartons that will be transported to the Central Drop Off in Northampton
- ⇒ Load a truck with the boxes on the final day of National Collection week
- ⇒ Drive the truck to College Church in Northampton

To sign up and to get more information, please speak to Charleen Bridgman, Drop Off Location Team Leader, at 499-3040, or send an email to secretary@gracecongregational.org

After receiving a shoebox, children have the opportunity to take part in **The Greatest Journey**, a 12-lesson discipleship and evangelism program. Upon completion of the program, graduates receive their own copy of a New Testament in their own language. Operation Christmas Child now reaches over 11 million children a year and is used by God to transform individual children, families and whole communities with the Good News of the Gospel.

What goes into the box is fun and useful.

What comes out is eternal!

SABBATH CONSCIOUSNESS

Rebecca Vandoodewaard

My earliest memories of church are almost all about what I wore—a gray velvet dress stood out clearly at three. As I grew older, I became aware of things in the service beyond our pew, but in a very limited way. Baptisms were exciting; the Lord's Supper was confusing. The minister, like an adult from a "Peanuts" cartoon, seemed to be mumbling away at the front of the church.

As I grew older, I started realizing that my father (by then my pastor) was actually speaking English. Words—"heaven," "David," "forgive"—came through. I slowly understood an entire sermon. It wasn't just random words; he was really saying something.

Years passed, and I realized that sermons were not just coherent "messages" about God, but sessions that equipped God's people to understand how His Word works and fits together and how to live out of it. Corporate prayers made more and more spiritual sense. Songs were articulate praise. I saw baptism as the new covenant sign that God places on His covenant people, and that in the Lord's Supper, we don't get a different Christ than in the preaching, but the same Christ in a different way. The liturgy became beautiful as I saw the theological logic in it.

Regardless of our chronological age at conversion this happens, doesn't it? We move from merely being aware of what is happening to understanding it, becoming more and more involved spiritually, and having the Word shape us more and more deeply. It's a waking up to what is happening around us. People come to realizations at unique times in a variety of sequences, depending on their age, background, and other factors.. But God uses Sundays to change every believer.

Comprehending what happens in a service is simply a means to an end. Understanding all of these elements allows us to wake up to the reality of who God is—and that is exactly why worship is transforming and sustaining. In a biblical service, each element of corporate worship is designed to give us a vision of our Lord, freeing us to respond through worship in acceptable, prescribed ways. There is a inverse relationship between becoming more conscious of God's person and work and less conscious of our person and work. The idol of self dies as our knowledge of the only wise God expands. Self-absorption gives way to self-forgetfulness through divine awareness.

Sunday after Sunday, my Sabbath consciousness increases. When we reach glory, all of these realizations will seem like early-morning stirrings compared to heaven's bright clarity. There, all clouds will vanish in the light, as weekly foretastes give way to eternal wakefulness.

But the greatness of that day does not diminish the significance of our weekly preparations here. God gives us each Sunday to make us fit for future reality. The day that God created the light is still a day when darkness fades. Let's be attentive—weekly, corporate worship is God's tool to kindly wake our sleepy souls.

Rebecca Vandoodewaard is an author and mother. She is author of *Reformation Women: Sixteenth-Century Figures Who Shaped Christianity's Rebirth* and the *Banner Board Books* series for children.

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Sanctification in a Box, and a Rowboat to the Rescue

Ian Bridgman

It has been some time since I have been able to produce an article for this newsletter. Running a Mexican food truck close to the top of the world doesn't leave much time for typing. Now, having finally emerged from 3 months in the forests of central Finland, I suppose I should write something about the experience. As many of you know, I left on my third trip to Kajaani, Finland just as the trees were turning green here at home to help my best friend and now business partner (it still feels REALLY weird to say that) get our little operation up and running.

It has long been Octavio's desire to put his cooking skills to use in his new country and support his family doing so. For me, it was a potentially profitable challenge to tackle along side my friend, with the bonus of learning a new language on the side. The initial groundwork was laid during my time there last year and continued through this winter as Octavio waded through the process of getting all the necessary licenses and certifications. Pre-launch stress and disagreements earlier in the spring caused serious doubt as to whether we could pull this off, but with everything finally in place, on May 1, *Bad Hombres Authentic Mexican Streetfood* was born.

I'm very pleased to say that on the business side, our little piece of Mexico in Finland was a success. Summer came early to Finland this year; it was the warmest May anyone could remember, and we were able to take full advantage. While June was dismally cold and rainy, the sun came out again in July and August and with it came the customers. Our food was well received as a welcome new addition to a very limited food scene in our small city, and we quickly developed a band of loyal followers. As expected, it was a lot of work. Not necessarily hard work, just lots of it. Our food requires a massive amount of preparation compared to other common Finnish street foods, but we offered something different, fresh, and authentic, something appreciated by our customers. We took pride in our product, and I believe, rightly so. It's also a well-known fact that business partnerships can wreak havoc on friendships. The potential for a falling out was one reason why we were hesitant to go into business together. We really wanted to join forces, but not at the cost of our friendship. In the end, we went for it, and I am so thankful that we remained almost entirely on the same page as to how *Bad Hombres* should be run. There were never disagreements over money, or strategy, or policy, and the business itself went much better than I had hoped or expected.

That's not to say that it was all easy. Hard times did come, not from the business side, but from the personal arena. Octavio and I have different personalities, different strengths, and different ways of expressing ourselves, and 3 months shoulder to shoulder in tight quarters exposed the gaps in our respective processes of sanctification. The long, often stressful hours in a 6x10 foot trailer rubbed our insecurities and weaknesses raw. Most days were hard, some days, exceptionally so. On top of that, we shared the same house, and when we took the trailer on the road, we even shared the same hotel room or camping cabin. Privacy and quiet time were prime commodities and we both felt the lack of them. It was always the little things that tripped us up. A nagging criticism or a correction taken the wrong way, an unneeded harsh response, or simply snapping over the smallest thing, would cause tensions to boil. I believe the struggle was not just personal, but spiritual as well. The enemy had a prime opportunity to pry apart a pair of Christian best friends and there were times when it was clear that he was playing his hand.

Continued on next page

My personal rescue often came in the form of a rowboat. I pray best when my mind is clear, and I find that my mind is clearest when I am exercising. Not in a noisy gym with the music pumping and the TVs on, but on a long run on a quiet road, or in this case a long paddle on a quiet lake. We were blessed to live on a large, remote lake, where the only sounds were the oars in the water or the occasional swan, and those peaceful hours spent on the water were the sweetest of the summer. I could row until my shoulders were sore, long into the 11pm sunsets, praying desperately for God to protect our friendship against the enemy's schemes at all costs. I found myself asking for more fruits of the Spirit; for patience, and kindness, and self-control. I had to be reminded that "a gentle answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1a) and how "pleasant words are . . . sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24). These words of wisdom I had memorized years ago went from being tidbits buried in my subconscious to being real tools to be used and applied, like a life-saver on a lake or a fire extinguisher on a food truck. As much as that trailer was a workplace, source of income, and breeding ground for conflict, I'm sure that it was also an instrument of sanctification and spiritual growth.

Thankfully, both our friendship and the business survived the summer, although there were signs that Kajaani, with its shrinking and aging population of 37,000, is too small to sustain our business at the level we would like. We put the wheels on our box to use and spent most of August in a larger city to the south, where we received an even warmer reception. Our experiment is currently winding down for the season, and Octavio will carry on by himself for a few more weeks until the frost returns and pushes the pedestrians back indoors. My involvement will be quite limited until I decide to return for the next summer season. You can pray for Octavio as he carries the weight of the business a little while longer, that he will find joy in his work and finish well. He will also need prayer as he determines what to do through the fall and winter. Their whole family will need prayer, as baby boy number two is expected next month, meaning big changes for everyone there.

On my end, I am happy for a bit of rest from the endless chopping of vegetables. I will need wisdom concerning if and when to return to Finland, and to determine what my continuing role in the business will be. I'm thankful to have had this chance to take on this kind of challenge, and I'm thankful for a successful and profitable first season. I'm also especially thankful for those of you who lifted us up in prayer, and hopefully this letter has better described some of the specific needs and challenges. Please continue to pray for us, as we plan to continue, that we would operate *Bad Hombres* faithfully and with integrity, and that our business would be a place where we can love the Lord with our talents, and love our neighbors, including each other. I won't miss the long hours or the arguments, but I will miss taking on a challenge with my best friend and the many good times we shared. I'll miss sharing our amazing food with the Finnish people, and, last but not least, I'll miss eating it too!





GRACE CHURCH NEWS



FALL SCHEDULE

Our fall schedule resumed on **Sunday, September 9th**, with **worship at 10:45 a.m.** and **Sunday School** for children and adults at **9:30 am**. The adult class is studying the book of Matthew.



MISSION PRESENTATION AND FELLOWSHIP PICNIC

After church on Sunday, September 16th, Seyvon Kouao will be reporting on his first mission trip. Come on out and hear about his time in Columbia this summer. We will also enjoy a fellowship picnic together. Hot dogs, hamburgers, buns and condiments will be provided. Please bring a side or dessert to share.



LOOKING AHEAD

LIVE COALS PRAYER

Our monthly time of corporate prayer takes place on the first Sunday of each month. Join us on **Sunday, October 7th, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** for a time of concerted prayer before our Heavenly Father. Come a bit earlier for a time of singing together before we enter into prayer.



WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDIES

Ladies, mark your calendars for the start of new study for women beginning **next month**.

-The **Ladies' Bible Class** will resume on **Tuesday, October 9th from 1:00 -2:30 p.m.** at the church for study and prayer using ***Mercy Revealed, A Cross-Centered Look at Christ's Miracles*** by Gerald M Bilkes,

Women of all ages are welcome to be a part of this group.



MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Men of all ages are invited to meet for a monthly time of study, discussion, and prayer **Saturday, October 20th, from 7-8:30 a.m.** at Doug Rose's home in Stockbridge. The men are using Bryan Chapell's *Unlimited Grace*. Breakfast is provided.





September/October 2018



Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
16 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship Missions and Cookout	17 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	18	19	20	21	22
23 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	24 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	25	26	27	28	29
30 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	OCTOBER 1 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	2	3	4	5	6
7 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00p.m. Live Coals Prayer	8 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	9 1:00 Ladies' Bible Class	10	11	12	13
14 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	15 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	16 1:00 Ladies' Bible Class	17	18	19	20 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
21 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	22 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	23 1:00 Ladies' Bible Class	24	25	26	27
28 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	29 7:00 pm Addictions Victorious	30 1:00 Ladies' Bible Class	31 Reformation Day			