The Interplay of Law and Grace in The Letter to the Romans from A Traditional Evangelical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the theological relationship between law and grace as presented in the Letter to the Romans from a traditional evangelical perspective. This study seeks to illuminate the ongoing theological tension between legalism and antinomianism by clarifying how the Apostle Paul presents the complementary roles of law and grace within God's plan of redemption. Romans was selected as the central text of this study because it presents Paul's doctrine of sin, justification, sanctification, and glorification in the most systematic form. This study applied a qualitative research method employing biblical exegesis, comparative theological analysis, and synthetic theological analysis. Based on a comprehensive exegesis of Romans, this study concluded that law and grace are not opposing theological concepts but complementary elements that work together within God's unified plan of salvation. The law reveals humanity's sinfulness and its inability to attain righteousness on its own, while grace presents the complete way of salvation God has prepared through the atoning work of Jesus Christ and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Throughout Romans, Paul does not emphasize human potential; rather, he emphasizes human hopelessness and God's grace. Humanity cannot be made righteous by the law but is made righteous only by God's grace. The standard for this study was set as Paul's teaching in Romans, and on this basis, the interpretations of Martin Luther, John Wesley, Douglas J. Moo, Thomas C. Oden, and Ock Soo Park were compared and analyzed. The findings confirmed that all the theologians compared share a common theological foundation in the core evangelical doctrine that humanity is saved not through the works of the law but solely through God's grace and faith in Jesus Christ. Yet each theologian emphasized a different aspect of the gospel: Luther emphasized justification by faith alone; Wesley focused on sanctification and holy living; Moo presented a redemptive-historical understanding of union with Christ; Oden emphasized the transforming power of grace at work within Christian discipleship; and Park placed particular emphasis on the law's function of exposing sin, the complete atonement accomplished by Christ, and the assurance of salvation received through faith. Furthermore, this dissertation presents Paul's order of redemption in the following integrated evangelical theological model: Law → Awareness of Sin → Conviction of Sin → God's Grace → Faith in Christ → Justification → Sanctification → Christian Maturity → Glorification. This study contributes to evangelical theology by presenting a balanced evangelical understanding of law and grace that avoids both legalism and antinomianism while maintaining the inseparable relationship between justification by faith and sanctification through the Spirit.

Keywords: Law, Grace, Romans, Justification, Sanctification