

“The Way, The Truth, The Life” (Part 2)

John 14.1–6

¹“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ²In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I AM the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” [NASB]

HOPE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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I. Introduction

A. *Two Troubled Persons*

You don't need to teach a child—let alone an adult—how to be troubled. We return this week to a room full of trouble, yet we find it is also a room full of peace. We recognized last week that there are two troubled persons remaining in this room.

One of them is Jesus Christ. ^{Jn13.21}“When Jesus had said this, He became *troubled* in spirit, and testified and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.’” The other is the Disciples of Jesus. I'm counting them as one, because they are all troubled for the same reason. So there are two troubled persons: Jesus, and his disciples.

B. *Two Troubling Prospects*

1. *Near God while under law as CoW*

We also found last week that there are two troubling prospects in that room. But not just in that room... there are two troubling prospects—and *only* two troubling prospects—in all the world. I'm shortly going to give you more evidence of that, but let me first explain the two troubling prospects.

The first troubling prospect is *being near to God when you are under the Law as a Covenant of Works*. The CoW is the formal relationship God established with Adam shortly after He first created him. What does it mean, “to be under the Law as a Covenant of Works”? Simply this: if you want to live happily, all you have to do is obey the 10Cs perfectly. You must do everything the 10Cs require, and you must not do anything they prohibit.

Oh, by the way, that does not just mean your outward actions. It includes the deepest affections of your heart, the simplest ruminations of your mind, the quietest whisper of your tongue, and the smallest action of your hand. Did you have to learn how to covet? So, you know how to covet? Oh, you've actually had an evil suspicion stirring in your heart? Enjoyed an adulterous thought in your mind? A murderous intention in your will?

What does it mean, “to be under the Law as a Covenant of Works”? Simply this: if you want to live happily, all you have to do is be holy—completely conformed to and in agreement with the will of the Most Holy God—in every atom of your body and every affection of your heart. Oh, you descended from Adam? Born into his guilty representation? Corrupt in all your parts by having inherited his corruption?

What does it mean, “to be under the Law as a Covenant of Works”? Simply this: if you want to live happily, all you have to do is pay off the debt you owe to God for your sins, and then you'll be cleared for happiness. You've offended the infinitely righteous and holy God, upon whom you depend for every breath and every heartbeat, for every bite of food and every bit of health. You can't count the number of offensive thoughts, words, and acts you've flung in His face.

But even if you could count them on one finger, the debt, the penalty, the price you'd have to pay would be infinite since He is infinite. That is, to satisfy the Law's demand for justice, you'll be paying for eternity. That doesn't leave much time ever after, for living happily. The Law as a Covenant of Works has one reward for you: vengeful, fiery, and just condemnation for all infinity of time. Hell for eternity.

It is very troubling to be near to God when you are under the Law as a Covenant of Works. And that Law will never go away, never diminish a hair in its authority or your obligation.

2. *Feel Far from God when under CoG*

The other—the only other—troubling prospect, is to feel far from God when you are under the Covenant of Grace. Last week, with Maria in *The Sound of Music*, we started in the very beginning. It was a very good place to start. But as we've just seen, we came to a very different conclusion. Maria

concluded, after starting in the beginning, that nothing comes from nothing—nothing ever could—so somewhere in her youth or childhood, she must have done something good. But we concluded last week that nowhere in Maria’s or our youth or childhood, have we *ever* done anything good that *deserved* the euphoric bliss she was feeling in the arms of her captain. Sweet as Julie—Maria, that is—may be, she was caught, you might say, in the Trapp of works-oriented self-righteousness.

So how do we explain the euphoric bliss we *do* experience in the arms of the Captain of *our* salvation?^{Heb2.10KJV} We do so by going back to long *before* the very beginning. From all eternity, God established a covenant with His own Son, and in Him with all the souls God had chosen to give as a bride, as an inheritance, to His Son Jesus Christ. Just like every other child of Adam and Eve, those chosen souls would be sinners represented by Adam. But unlike every other child of Adam and Eve, God would reconcile these chosen souls to Himself by removing them from their CoW connection to Adam, and transferring them into the CoG connection with God’s Son Jesus. Out of Adam... into Jesus.

What does it mean, then, to be under the Covenant of Grace? Simply this: if you want to live happily, all Jesus had to do was obey the 10Cs perfectly. He had to do everything the 10Cs require, and He had to not do anything they prohibit. Oh, by the way, that did just mean His outward actions. It means the deepest affections of His heart, the simplest ruminations of His mind, the quietest whisper of His tongue, and the smallest action of His hand had to be precisely and perfectly what His Father wanted. Jesus never coveted! Jesus never had an evil suspicion stirring in his heart! Never enjoyed an adulterous thought in His mind! Never a murderous intention in his will!

What does it mean, then, to be under the Covenant of Grace? Simply this: if you want to live happily, all Jesus had to do was be holy—completely conformed to and in agreement with the will of the Most Holy God—in every atom of his body and every affection of his heart. He did not descend from Adam by ordinary generation; He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. Jesus was not born into Adam’s guilty representation. Jesus had and has *no* corruption in any part.

What does it mean, then, to be under the Covenant of Grace? Simply this: if you want to live happily, all Jesus had to do was pay off the debt *you* owe to God for *your* sins, so *you’d* be cleared for happiness. All *your* offenses against the infinitely righteous and holy God had to be rightfully punished under the Law. Jesus, who is fully human and perfectly holy and without any sin, was qualified to substitute for *you* who are human and fully sinful.

Jesus, fully God and thus infinite, was qualified and able to satisfy the Law’s demand for infinite justice. Infinite justice for one sin... infinite justice for *all* of your sins... infinite justice for *all* the sins of *all* those God chose from long before the very beginning to save. Jesus suffered the infinite and eternal pains of hell in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the cross, and in the tomb. Then He rose from the dead, proving that God was satisfied. Satisfied with Jesus... satisfied for *you*. Life—happy life—abundantly happy life—overcame judgment, death, and hell, for those united to Jesus in the Covenant of Grace.

What does it mean, then, to be under the Covenant of Grace? Simply this: if you want to live happily, you have to present to God the perfect obedience of Jesus, the perfect holiness of Jesus, and the perfect satisfaction by Jesus for all demands of the Law as a Covenant of Works. And the only way you can present these to God, is through trusting in Jesus to have done all this for *you*. I said *Jesus*. I said *has done*. I said *all* this. I said *for you*. God will be satisfied with nothing less than everything the Law requires. Jesus accomplished everything the Law requires. Your faith in Jesus gives you possession of nothing... but takes possession of everything Jesus has been and done for you.

The Covenant of Grace has one reward for you: Jesus for eternity. If you are under the CoG, then, you know. You know how troubling it is to feel far from Jesus. The disciples were feeling far from Jesus as He spoke about going away... even though He assured them He was going to prepare a place for them so that they might be very, very near to Him forever.

II. Two Troubling Prospects Proved

A. *Evidences of Near God while under law as CoW*

Now for some evidence of these two very troubling prospects. I have scanned the Scriptures and found no exceptions. There are only two prospects by which people are called “troubled.” Here are a few of the many examples.

It is very troubling to be near God when you are under the Law as a CoW. After they sinned, Adam and Eve were so troubled that they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.^{Ge3.8} See how darkened their minds had already become—thinking they could hide from the One who knows all and sees all. As if they could be safe by having a tree between them and God. What they really needed was to hide in the grip of a Branch... and God was coming to tell them that He had planned long before to send such a One.^{Jer23.5}

It is very troubling to be near God when you are under the Law as a CoW. Just ask Pharaoh. He had a dream. Two, actually. Seven sleek and fat cows grazing... then along came seven ugly and gaunt cows that gobbled up the grazing cows. Seven good ears of corn... then seven scorched ears swallowed the good ears. Pharaoh awoke and “his spirit was *troubled*.”^{Ge41.8} God had come near and Pharaoh couldn’t save himself from seven years of judgment famine. Pharaoh needed a mediator named Joseph to bring him a favorable answer.^{v16} That answer saved Egypt, and preserved Abraham’s descendents Israel. Through Israel would come Christ who saves us from the Law as a CoW.

It is very troubling to be near God when you are under the Law as a CoW. Ask the nations who tried to tangle with God’s people as God led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land.^{Di2.25c} “This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under the heavens, who, when they hear the report of you, will [be troubled] and be in anguish because of you.” It is troubling when ^{Ps2.4c} “He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them.”⁵ Then He will speak to them in His anger and [trouble] them in His fury...”

Of those who do iniquity, says the Lord through the psalmist,^{Ps6.10c} “All my enemies will be ashamed and greatly [troubled]; they shall turn back, they will suddenly be ashamed.” It is very troubling to be near God when you are under the Law as a CoW. Ask the Babylonians. Isaiah said,^{Is13.6c} “Wail, for the day of the LORD is *near*! It will come as destruction from the Almighty... every man’s heart will melt.”⁸ They will be [troubled], pains and anguish will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labor...”

It is very troubling to be near God when you are under the Law as a CoW. Ask Herod the king. When he heard the wise men from the East talking about a King who would judge him, Herod was *troubled*.^{Mt2.2} Immanuel, God with us, was near; and Herod was full of fear. Why were the crowds in Thessalonica and Berea troubled? They heard that another King, much greater than Caesar, was near.^{Act17.8,13}

Now, most importantly, why was Jesus troubled? Why, when Jesus saw Mary weeping after the death of Lazarus, was He deeply moved to anger in spirit and why was He *troubled*?^{Jn11.33} He was angry at the devil for tormenting His beloved with doubt. And Jesus was *troubled* because He saw all the sin, sorrow, grief, and death HE would have to bear under the Law as a CoW in our place.

Why, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, did He say,^{Jn12.27c} “Now My soul has become *troubled*; and what shall I say, “Father, save Me from this hour’?” He was troubled because, “But for this purpose I came to this hour.” He was troubled because He had come to the hour when He would bear on the cross all the condemnation that the Law as a CoW demands for your sins and mine.

For the same reason, Jesus became troubled in Spirit in this very upper room, when Judas would try to satisfy the law by betraying the Savior. Jesus would satisfy the Law for you and for me and for all the other disciples. But not for Judas. Judas preferred presenting his own treacherous disobedience rather than

Jesus’ perfect obedience. It is very troubling to be near God when you are under the Law as a CoW. That’s why Judas ran from that room where Jesus was.

Jesus was born of a woman, to live and die under the law as a Covenant of Works for you and for me, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law.^{Gal4.4f} Thus He cried,^{Ps55.4} “My heart is [troubled] within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me.” It is *very* troubling to be near God when you are under the Law as a CoW.

B. Evidences of trouble far from God when under CoG

But you say there is only one other kind of trouble—feeling far from God when you are under the CoG? Where is the evidence for that? The psalmist so clearly reveals to us the troubles in Jesus’ soul and in ours. He cries out,^{Ps30.7NKJ} “LORD, by Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong; You hid Your face, and I was *troubled*.” Saints of Hope, you know Christ your Rock stands strong. But when He hides His face you are *troubled*!

^{Ps42.6} “O my God, my soul is [troubled] within me; therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan and the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.” The only solution to being troubled is remembering that Jesus is *near*, in the deep valleys or on the mountain heights. When people around you hate you and mock you because you follow God’s law with great delight in His commands, He may feel far away.^{Ps55.2NIV} “Hear me and answer me. My thoughts *trouble* me and I am [troubled]³ at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger.⁴ My heart is [troubled] within me; the terrors of death assail me.”^{143:4NAU} “My spirit is overwhelmed within me; my heart is [troubled] within me.”

When you who do believe in Jesus have sinned against God, and have not yet turned again to Him in repentance and felt His forgiveness, you know^{Ps90.7KJV} “we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we *troubled*.” Even for the animals who unconsciously depend upon God’s benevolence,^{104.29NKJ} “You hide Your face, they are *troubled*; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.”

When Joseph in Egypt revealed himself to his brothers,^{Gen45.3} “his brothers could not answer him, for they were [troubled] at his presence.” They who had received God’s covenant promises through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob felt like God was far away... they did not understand that God’s blessing was very *near* in the person of their brother Joseph.

There was a priest named Zacharias who knew the joy of being near the Lord in the Temple. But then^{Lk1.11} “an angel of the Lord appeared to him...¹² Zacharias was *troubled* when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him.¹³ But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.’” Zacharias felt far from a Mediator, but the angel told him that his own son John the Baptist would herald the arrival of the Mediator, Immanuel, God come near.

Later on, Jesus’ disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee when a terrifying storm suddenly blew up. In that stormy night they^{Mt14.26NKJ} “saw Him walking on the sea, and they were *troubled*, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear.” They felt like they were far from their Savior, for he had remained behind on land. It is troubling to feel far from Jesus when you know that to live is to be near Jesus.

Again, when the disciples were trying to make sense of their encounters with the resurrected Redeemer,^{Lk24.36} “He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be to you.’³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.³⁸ And He said to them, ‘Why are you *troubled*, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?’³⁹ See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” They felt like they were far from Jesus—at least the God-Man they knew. It is very *troubling* when you feel like Jesus is some far-off spirit, and not a Man who can embrace you in His strong and loving arms.

The Apostle Paul fought ferociously against false teachers who make you feel like you have to obey certain rules and regulations in order for God to come near. ^{Gall:7ESV}“There are some who *trouble* you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” It is very troubling when you, even under the CoG, feel like you have to do things just right if you want Jesus to come near. It is troubling when you fear that if you don’t do it just right, God will keep his distance. That is *not* the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

And finally, Peter understood that it is easy to feel far from Jesus when people who hate Jesus hate you. So he urges us, ^{1Pe3:14}“Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be *troubled*,¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

You see, when you set Christ apart as Lord in your heart, you are doing nothing other than acknowledging His *nearness*, and embracing Him as the One who delivered you out of the man Adam and into the God-Man Jesus. Now his law is no terror, but rather the delightful rule of your life. What, after all *is* your hope? The account of your hope is this: God is *near* to you in Jesus Christ His Son, by arrangement of the Covenant of Grace. It is not so hard to be gentle and reverent when you remember Jesus is near to you in love.

III. Conclusion

I suspect you are not surprised, and trust you are not troubled, that we have not yet come to v6. Do come near again next week. Then you will hear of the Un-Troubled Path: The Way, The Truth, The Life.

Until then, take stock of what is troubling you. You can boil it down to one—and only one—of two things. One troubling prospect is an easy burden; the other is utterly unbearable. Perhaps God is near and you are still under the Law as a Covenant of Works. If that is the case, then humble yourself before God. You’ll never impress Him with all the things you call good works. You’ll never impress Him with your insistence that you really are a good person. You’ll never impress Him, and deep down inside you know it. That is why you are troubled.

You need Jesus to impress God *for* you. You have a warrant to trust in Jesus to impress God for you. Jesus said, ^{Jn6:50}“This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I AM the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.” He said that to Jews, to Gentiles, to Pharisees, even to lawyers and engineers. Everyone in this room has a warrant to trust in Jesus to impress God for you. Do it. Do it now! Be transferred from the CoW and into the CoG.

Or... you are under the Covenant of Grace and you feel like Jesus is far from you. You know you need Jesus to impress God for you. And you know you need Jesus near in order to know being *alive*. Be strong and of good courage, for He *is* near. It is good for your soul to pant after Him. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. If you are troubled that Jesus seems far from you, then you are counted among these blessed.

Recognize your trouble for what it *is*, and recognize it for what it is *not*. It is easy to do, when there are only two possibilities. In fact, have some fun with that this week! Delight yourself in the Lord our Righteousness! Delight yourself in knowing that however troubled you are by feeling He is far... you are *not* troubled—repeat, you are NOT troubled—by the impossible burden of having to impress God. Go ahead, delight yourself in Him. Remember His mercy. Recount His covenant promise. Relax in His love. You might even find yourself laughing heartily... and Jesus very nearby... *laughing heartily with you in His arms*.