

What does the New Testament teach about LAW AND GRACE?

What is the meaning of grace? Does it nullify—“do away with”—the law? Is grace a “license” to sin? Does “not under the law” mean grace has replaced it—and removed any need for Christians to produce good works? What did Christ and His apostles teach? What does the Bible really say?

WHAT IS THE New Testament teaching on “law and grace”? Is it one or the other—law *versus* grace—or both—law *and* grace? This is a subject of great controversy, leaving many confused. *This need not be.* Here is the plain Bible teaching!

The meaning of grace in the New Testament has nothing to do with abolishing God’s laws. False teachers who promote “grace” over obedience are unaware that the New Testament was written for those whom God calls to assume roles of great responsibility in His kingdom. These false teachers misunderstand because God has neither opened their minds nor given them His Holy Spirit, which is necessary to comprehend His truth.

The Christian calling (Rom. 8:29-30) is based on grace—*unmerited pardon of past sins* and *forgiveness* upon genuine repentance. Christians understand that the very salvation offered to them is a *gift*, and that they must continue to live a lifetime of obedience (Acts 5:32, John 14:15) and overcoming.

The Law in Perspective

Most religionists claim that God’s law was abolished by Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. They think that mankind is no longer burdened by the stringent requirements

of that “harsh law” that stands in their way of freedom—of “having a good time.” But the apostle Paul wrote, in Romans 7:7, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. No, I had not known sin, *but by the law*: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet.” Most churchmen have traditionally condemned the law while absolving sin. However, it is not the *law* that is at fault, but *sin*. On our own, we cannot discover God’s perfect law. God has to reveal and teach it to us.

Leaders of professing Christianity insist that God’s spiritual law—the Ten Commandments—is done away. They call it the “law of Moses,” claiming that it was abolished by Christ’s sacrifice. But they do not know the difference between the Levitical sacrificial rituals, the law of Moses and the law of God.

The Ten Commandments were not called the law of Moses, but rather the *law of God*. The law of Moses consisted of: (1) the civil laws—the statutes and judgments that Moses relayed to the people from God, recorded in Exodus 21-23 and the remaining books of the Law—and (2) the ritualistic laws (Greek: *ergon*) added later, summarized in Hebrews 9:10. These ordinances regulated the Levitical sacrifices (Lev. 1-7) and related duties. *Ergon* means “works,” as in the “works of the law” (Gal. 2:16). This referred to the labor involving Levitical rituals abolished by Christ’s sacrifice.

The Ten Commandments were never part of the law of Moses or the Levitical sacrificial system. The civil laws and sacrifices were based on God’s Commandments, which make up the core of God’s laws. Thus, the Ten Commandments precede and transcend every lesser law based upon them—statutes, judgments, precepts and ordinances. Most professing Christians falsely brand the Ten Commandments as the “Old Covenant.” However, the Old Covenant was based on the Ten Commandments, which preceded and transcended the Old Covenant.

Consider this analogy: The idea promoted by most professing Christians—that God’s spiritual law, the Ten Commandments, has been abolished—is as ridiculous as claiming that the physical laws of gravity and inertia are no longer enforced. Theologians cannot negate God’s law any more than scientists can void the laws of gravity and inertia.

How did the leaders of the New Testament Church view the laws of God? Paul wrote, “Wherefore the law is *holy*, and the commandment *holy*, and *just*, and *good*” (Rom. 7:12). The apostle John wrote, “For *this is the love of God* that we *keep His commandments* and His commandments *are not grievous*” (I John 5:3). And Christ summed up the matter, saying, “...if you will enter into life, *keep the commandments*” (Matt. 19:17).

In Matthew 7:21, He also said, “Not everyone that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *does the will* of My Father which is in heaven”!

Christ and the apostles did not dismiss God’s law. Counterfeit Christianity took this drastic step in the first century—the world has blindly followed ever since.

The “Grace” of False Christianity

Let’s examine traditional Christianity’s teaching of grace. It teaches that the Old Covenant *was* the Ten Commandments. It maintains that Christ came to establish a “new covenant” containing only grace and promises—liberty to do whatever one pleases. Law is not included in their package. In their own minds, these creative religionists have devised a way to “have a good time” and have a clear conscience. They had to eliminate the source of their gnawing guilt. The solution was simple: “Grace alone ‘saves’ men. The burden of commandment-keeping is no longer necessary.”

This diabolical teaching would lead you to believe that the law of God is harsh and cruel. It proclaims that the fault of the Old Covenant was with the *law*, and since God gave the law, the fault must have been *His*. Read what Christ says to those who follow these false precepts: “Howbeit in vain do you worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For *laying aside the commandment of God*, you hold the tradition of men...Full well you *reject the commandment of God*, that you may keep your *own* tradition” (Mark 7:7-9).

Notice the warning that God inspired in the book of Jude: “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was *once delivered* unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the *grace* of our God into *lasciviousness*, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3-4).

Even before the New Testament was completely written, ungodly men had

crept into the Church in an attempt to corrupt it by turning *grace* into *lasciviousness*. This was precisely the false gospel taught by Simon Magus, Nicholas of Samaria, Cerinthus and other “founders” of counterfeit Christianity.

Lasciviousness means “license to sin.” It could also be defined as “unrestrained liberty” or “abuse of privilege.” In essence, this meant license to do what seems right in one’s own eyes, according to one’s own conscience.

Just as Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24) and others turned God’s grace into license to disobey His law, this same attitude permeates the minds of most professing Christians today.

The universal message from most pulpits falsely tells people that Christ abolished His Father’s law—but your Bible states otherwise. No one can be born into God’s kingdom unless he completely submits to God’s authority.

Grace—The True Definition

Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defines *grace* as “favor, kindness and mercy.” The ecclesiastical usage is defined as “divine mercy and forgiveness.” No mention is made about grace being license to disobey God’s law. To be “under grace” means to be extended *mercy* and *forgiveness* as a result of sincere repentance and resolve to obey God.

This is explained further in Roman 6:14-15: “For sin shall not have dominion over you for you are not *under the law*, but under grace. What then? *Shall we sin*, because we are not under the law, but under grace? *God forbid*.” Many misunderstand the concept of “under the law,” which means *under the penalty of the law*. Notice Galatians 5:18: “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” You *are* under the penalty of the law if you violate it as a way of life.

But a person led by God’s Spirit will strive to follow that law. When he occasionally sins, he repents and is forgiven (I John 1:8-10). By virtue of obedience and grace, he is not under the *penalty* of the law.

When an individual seeks to obey God and comes under the “umbrella” of grace, the blood of Christ justifies, or forgives, all past transgressions.

Repentance shows God the direction a Christian chooses to take from that time forward. Having been made right with God by His mercy and forgiveness, a Christian embarks on a new course in life—he is *SAVED* by Christ’s LIFE, not His death!

Consider! Only if Christ has risen from the dead can His Spirit guide and strengthen new converts, for it is the Holy Spirit that leads Christians. Paul wrote, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14).

This means that Christ, as our living, active High Priest in Heaven, sends the Holy Spirit to those whom the Father calls and begets. As High Priest, Christ is our living Intercessor and Advocate, who sees us through life as we seek to overcome and endure to the end. The fact that Christ is alive allows Him to function as an Advocate for Christians. In this way, we are saved by His life. Repentance is a continual state of mind. Thus, forgiveness is also continual. Also, it is the Spirit of the living Christ in Christians that will change them at the resurrection (Rom. 8:14-17), so that they can receive eternal life.

Romans 6:23 explains that the wages of sin is death. Upon repentance, baptism and conversion, a Christian is forgiven by the blood of Christ and *immediately* saved from the penalty of PAST sins. So, in one sense, the person has been “saved,” *at that moment*, from death.

There are two more applications of when and how a person is saved. The word *salvation* is derived from the word *saved*. So, the second way is the most obvious—salvation at the resurrection upon Christ’s Return (I Cor. 15:50-55; I Thes. 4:13-18).

The third way one is saved is that he is “being saved.” No one receives salvation in this life without first undergoing much trial, testing, learning, growing and overcoming. Salvation is an *ongoing process*—throughout one’s lifetime.

Notice what Paul wrote in Romans 5: “Much more than *being justified by His blood*, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall *be saved by His life*” (vs. 9-10).

Salvation results from grace—unmerited pardon. The calling to and the gift of repentance are not earned by works. God’s grace is not earned by works. All that human beings have earned is death. *To be under grace does not mean that we have already achieved salvation.* It means we have been given unmerited pardon and are in the process of overcoming and enduring. Those who endure to the end of this physical existence are saved—saved from eternal death. No one can boast that he has achieved salvation in this life. “But he that shall *endure unto the end*, the same shall *be saved*” (Matt. 24:13). Having endured and overcome means that one has “qualified.” It also means that one can *disqualify* himself by failing to endure or overcome. Yet, the calling, the justification—*this* grace is a gift. Salvation results from God’s grace.

The false idea that “once under grace, we are already saved” is not founded upon scripture. Grace is God’s willingness to forgive *past sins*, as summarized in Ephesians 1:7: “...in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

Now examine a key scripture: “For by grace are you saved through faith;

and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). The faith “not of yourselves,” instrumental to salvation, *is not your own human* faith. It is the *gift of God*—the faith *of Christ* in us (Gal. 2:20). Jesus Christ, our High Priest, looks down and observes our sincerity and effort, and imparts His faith to us through His grace—divine favor and mercy. Those who receive this faith have no grounds for boasting of *their* works.

Notice the following: “...for it is GOD which works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). God provides Christians with the *WILLPOWER, FAITH OF CHRIST* and *MOTIVATION* to do His good pleasure. God the Father and Jesus Christ have gone to great lengths to provide the grace—favor and divine mercy—to help Christians succeed in their calling. But they expect *results!* That is the message of Ephesians 2: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works*, which God has before ordained that we should *walk in them*” (vs. 10).

How plain the Bible becomes when we let it interpret itself! It is ironic that most professing Christians stop at this point and miss the very core of Paul’s statement.

The real issue here is not grace *OR* works. Neither is it grace *OPPOSED TO* works. Nor is it grace *IN THE PLACE OF* works. It is simply this: Grace *FOLLOWED BY* works.

Here are some vital gifts and tools that God gives us in our quest to succeed and overcome:

- Grace—justification and forgiveness.

- Grace—God’s giving of mercy and favor.

- The faith of Christ in us.

- God’s Spirit, through which we receive the willpower and motivation to forge ahead.

God extends grace and help to His people, but He expects us to grow in good works, *walking in them* as a way of life. The law of God is the standard or benchmark that directs the paths of true Christians. Keeping them develops character. Doing these things shows God that the grace He has extended to us has not been in vain.

If we follow God’s grace with works, Christ’s description of those who will rise at the first resurrection could apply to us: “Here is the patience of the saints: *here are they that keep the commandments of God, AND THE FAITH OF JESUS*” (Rev. 14:12). □

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