

# Parties of Law Versus Relationships of Grace

by David Lee Burris

## OBEDIENCE TO THE RULES WON'T SAVE YOU

Please don't misunderstand. Jesus was not attacking the Pharisees for their obedience or holding it against them. He was attacking them because they were trusting in that obedience for their justification; because they were using it as a way to marginalize and judge others; because their outward compliance was more important to them than the heart of the Law: love for God and neighbor; and more damnably, because they thought they could buy God's favor with their behavior, that God owed them somehow.

Luke's narrative gives the intent of the story: "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous ..." (v. 9). The Pharisees had stopped trusting in God and had started trusting in themselves and their own abilities. They were human beings, in other words, and like any of us, no matter how much they obsessed over their daily record, they could never have earned their righteousness before God.

There is one final wrinkle. We learn that Jesus told this parable not simply because they were trusting in themselves, but because they "treated others with contempt." Their belief in their capacity to be good enough to impress God and other people fueled contempt for those who weren't obeying the way they were. The connection is not an arbitrary one. Because it engendered hatred for their neighbors and disdain for grace. Some might say this same diagnosis applies to Christians today.

What we see here—and just about everywhere throughout the Gospels—is that the immoral person gets the Gospel before the moral one does. The prostitute understands grace while the Pharisee doesn't. It is the actively unrighteous younger brother who grasps it before his self-righteous older brother. Our goodness is just as toxic as our badness, maybe even more so.

Back to the parable.

## A WELL-DESERVED BAD REPUTATION

The tax collector really was as bad as he thought he was - tax collectors were essentially debauched thugs and thieving traitors. At some point in this tax collector's life, his love of money had overcome his allegiance to his brothers and sisters, and he had betrayed them.

Jesus wasn't setting him up as someone to be emulated. Jesus exalted this man because he did not even dare to lift up his eyes, instead beating his breast and crying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Undoubtedly, when Jesus's audience heard this prayer, they scoffed and said, "Of course he's a sinner! That's the understatement of the century!" But because he knew that he had nothing to bring to the table, righteousness-wise, he went away justified. **With empty hands, he could receive the free gift of grace.**

Again, sinners love and value grace simply because they know they need it! The self-righteous good man who is impressed with himself is the one who chafes against God's free gift. This is no coincidence. Those who think they are "good" are, in fact, the ones most in need of grace—and the most opposed to it. Yet the whole point of this parable is to demonstrate that Christ has come to bless those who know they are bad and not those who think they are good.

To put it another way, Jesus did not come to offer moral reformation, he came to effect a **mortal resurrection**. Which is precisely what all of us need—both the "bad people" who know they're bad and the "good people" who think they're good. All of us have fallen short of the glory of God. The Law levels the playing field.

If you're simply looking for moral reformation (improved behavior), you might need a life coach, a cheerleading section, or a really good friend, but not a Savior. But if you require mortal resurrection, you're going to need something beyond yourself, someone who will raise dead people to life, give sight to the blind, and set captives free.

Jesus uses this parable to tell those of us who think we have it together, who never miss work or church, who love our kids and take our wives out on dates, who read our Bibles each morning, that we are still needy beggars who find acceptance with God in Christ's righteousness *alone*. *Alone!* We never outgrow our need for grace—ever.

## HOW TO LOSE FRIENDS AND ALIENATE PEOPLE

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom. 8:7–8)

We who were dead have been made alive.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4–6)

The painful struggle to which Paul is giving voice arises from his condition as someone who has been raised from the dead and is now alive to Christ (justified before God), but sin continues to plague him.

So even after we become Christians, our thoughts, words, motives, deeds, and affections need the constant cleansing of Christ's blood and the forgiveness that comes our way for free. We never outgrow our need for Christ's finished work on our behalf—we never graduate beyond our desperate need for Christ's righteousness and his strong and perfect blood-soaked plea "before the throne of God above."

This is why the Gospel is just as much for Christians as it is for non-Christians. Our dire need for God's grace doesn't get smaller after God saves us. In one sense, it actually gets bigger. Christian growth, says the apostle Peter, is always growth into grace, not away from it.

Remember, the apostle Paul referred to himself as the least of all the saints and the chief of sinners at the *end* of his life. For Paul, spiritual growth had to do with the realization of how utterly dependent he was on the mercy and grace of God. He did not arrive at some point where he needed Jesus less.

## SINFUL SAINTS AND SAINTLY SINNERS

At this point someone might say, “Wait a minute. Is *sinner* an appropriate term to describe a Christian’s identity? After all, didn’t Paul refer to Christians as saints? Once God saves us, aren’t we new creatures? The old (sinner) is gone, and the new (saint) has come?” These are important questions.

The designation of *sinner* is misapplied only if it is used to describe the Christian’s core *identity*—their person. Before God, identity is *not* a both/and (sinner *and* saint); it is an either/or (sinner *or* saint). The basis of this difference is not [merited] anthropological. It is strictly and solely Christological: to be in Christ is to be righteous before God.

Paul does something unprecedented (in comparison with early Jewish literature) in that he designates all people outside of Christ with the identity *sinner* (Rom. 5:8, for example). But even more novel and scandalous is his corresponding claim that it is precisely sinners who are, in Christ, identified as freely justified (Rom. 3:23–24). Sinners and saints at the same time, in other words! So, *simul justus et peccator* is *not* a description of our Christian identity; it is *not* a description of who we are before God. It is, however, a description of the both/and that characterizes the Christian life *as lived* here and now, in the real world.

Pastorally, and in our relationships with other people, this truth allows us to affirm (without crossing our fingers) that in Christ—at the level of identity—the Christian is 100 percent righteous before God, while at the same time recognizing the persistence of sin. If we don’t speak in terms of two coexistence states then the undeniable reality of ongoing sin leads to the qualification of our identity in Christ: some sin must mean not totally righteous..

If you’re a Christian, here’s the good news: Who you *really* are has nothing to do with you—how much you can accomplish, who you can become, your strengths, your weaknesses, your sordid past, your family background, your education, and so on. Your identity is firmly anchored in Christ’s accomplishment, not yours; his strength, not yours; his performance, not yours; his victory, not yours. Your identity is steadfastly established in his substitution, not your sin.

The late Brennan Manning put this better than I ever could when he wrote, “To live by grace means to acknowledge my whole life story, the light side and the dark. In admitting my shadow side, I learn who I am and what God’s grace means.... My deepest awareness of myself is that I am deeply loved by Jesus Christ and I have done nothing to earn it or deserve it.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tchividjian, T. (2013). [\*One way love: inexhaustible grace for an exhausted world\*](#). Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

# AN OFFENSIVE GIFT

The legendary antagonist of Hugo's *Les Misérables* is the unrelenting and supremely competent inspector Javert. When we initially meet him, Javert is serving as a guard at the jail where Jean Valjean is imprisoned. When Valjean is given parole, it is Javert who insists that no matter where he goes or what he does, he will always be defined as a criminal. After the plot details recounted in chapter 4, Valjean breaks his parole and eventually assumes a false identity as mayor of a small town. A few years later, Javert, now promoted to the rank of inspector, recognizes his former prisoner and makes it his personal vendetta to bring him to justice. He does his job, but Valjean eludes him.

To say that Inspector Javert is committed to the rigorous inflexibility of the law would be an understatement. Javert does more than enforce the law—he embodies it. Indeed, mankind's relationship with the law was actually one of the main themes of the book, according to Victor Hugo himself. When they adapted the work for the stage, Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg made this very clear. "Mine is the way of the law," Javert sings early on.

Valjean refuses to play by the same rules of quid pro quo, going so far as to be gracious with Javert in their several encounters. Valjean's treatment of him haunts and radically disorients Javert. In the climatic scene, instead of doing away with him once and for all, Valjean saves Javert's life. Javert is utterly undone by this unexpected act of mercy. Hugo's description of his inner conflict captures the offense of grace at its most visceral:

Jean Valjean confused him. All the axioms that had served as the supports of his life crumbled away before this man. Jean Valjean's generosity toward him, Javert, overwhelmed him.... Javert felt that something horrible was penetrating his soul, admiration for a convict.... A beneficent malefactor, a compassionate convict, kind, helpful, clement, returning good for evil, returning pardon for hatred, loving pity rather than vengeance, preferring to destroy himself rather than destroy his enemy, saving the one who had struck him, kneeling on the heights of virtue, nearer angels than men. Javert was compelled to acknowledge that this monster existed.

This could not go on....

All that [Javert] believed in was dissipating. Truths he had no wish for besieged him inexorably.... Authority was dead in him. He had no further reason for being.

The Law is ironclad. It does not make exceptions. It cannot abide mercy. Like a robot being given a directive that contradicts its programming, the law-addicted person has a complete meltdown when shown grace. Which is precisely what happened to Javert.

In the same scene in the musical, he sings:

*I am the Law and the Law is not mocked ...  
Granting me my life today  
this man has killed me even so.*

For Javert, as with all of us, the logic of law makes sense. He has lived his entire life according to the if-then conditionality: if you do wrong, then you must be punished. This makes him, and us, feel safe. It's easy to comprehend. It promotes a sense of manageability. And best of all, it keeps him, and us, in control. **We get to keep our ledgers and scorecards.** Javert would rather die than deal with the disorienting reality of the one-way love he receives from Valjean—so he jumps into the river, ending his life. *He chooses death over grace, control over chaos.*

Like Javert, we are, by nature, allergic to grace. The logic of grace is deeply offensive to our law-locked hearts. In fact, it isn't really logic at all. **It is more of a counterintuition that turns everything upside down and inside out.** If the law says, "Good people get good stuff; bad people get bad stuff," then grace says, "The bad get the best; the worst inherit the wealth; the slave becomes a son."

Our initial response to one-way love tends to be one of shock and suspicion. We hear, "Of course you don't deserve it, but I'm giving it to you anyway." We wonder, *What is this really about? What's the catch?* Internal bells and alarms start to go off, and we begin saying, "Wait a minute.... This sounds too good to be true." Like Javert, we wonder about the ulterior motives of the excessively generous. What's in it for Him? After all, who could trust in or believe something so radically unbelievable?

But perhaps, like Javert, our defenses and suspicions are finally overwhelmed, and we are brought face-to-face with the extent of this free gift. When we do, we may find that disbelief is replaced by fear. Grace violates our deepest sense of justice and rightness, and like Javert, we are scared to death when grace wrests control completely out of our hands. In fact, life according to the law no longer makes sense in light of grace. Fearful of what kind of chaos would ensue if we abandoned ourselves wholly to its radicality, we cling to control—we stick with what we know so well, with what comes naturally. And just like Javert, **we choose death over freedom.**

Of course, the offensiveness of grace is not limited to literature. It is one of the main themes of the Bible. As we all know, Jesus encountered massive amounts of resistance to his ministry; indeed, his message is what got him killed. Grace was enormously threatening to the status quo then, just as it is today. As much as we might crave it when we are at the end of our rope, one-way love runs counter to the natural inclinations of the human heart - we see its offensiveness born out in the Bible, in the church, and in our everyday lives.

One of the Pharisees asked [Jesus] to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." (Luke 7:36–39)

## A RUINED DINNER PARTY

To grasp the depth of the offense we read of here, we need to understand a few things about social mores in the ancient Near East. From their earliest years, girls were instructed in proper etiquette. They were warned by their mothers about what happened to women who ignored the rules. Those women were the kind of women other women would shun. They weren't welcome in "nice" society, and self-respecting men disdained them. They had to hide during the day and do whatever work they did under the cover of night. And if they ever once decided that they might want to get right with God, there wasn't really any avenue open to them. Once a woman was marked as being immoral, beyond the pale, a sinner, she was and always would be an outcast.

## YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU

Notice the names and lack thereof. We are given the name of the Pharisee who had invited Jesus for dinner, Simon, but the name of the woman who barges in goes unrecorded. Perhaps because it does not need to be. She is known by reputation, "the" immoral woman, "the" sinner. When news of this encounter gets out, it is very likely that nobody wonders, even for a moment, who the "she" is.

Now, not only was this woman despised for her lifestyle, she was evidently unafraid of adding fuel to the fire. First, she entered Simon's home uninvited and unaccompanied. "Who does she think she is? How dare she?" everyone in attendance would have murmured in shocked dismay. This was the *last* person you would want coming to a dinner party. She wasn't crashing just any dinner party—it was a party at the home of a religious leader, a Pharisee, a holy man, the opposite of a place where she might conceivably be welcome. So here she came, this epitome of everything a woman should not be—rebellious, promiscuous, uncouth, foolish, and very likely diseased—and she threw herself down at the feet of Simon's guest. Why didn't she just wait for Jesus outside or try to catch him beforehand? Why wasn't she afraid of what would happen?

Her brazenness didn't end there. No, the indignities just kept multiplying. Out from under her soiled robes, she brought an alabaster flask of ointment. Onlookers could easily surmise where she had gotten the money to buy it and for what purposes she had previously used it. But now she fell behind a reclining Jesus, while Simon, the disciples, and even the house slaves stood aghast. She poured her precious perfume on Jesus's feet. Then she uncovered her head (another religious no-no), took down her hair, and used her hair as a towel to clean him. Apparently, she wept so intensely that her tears made a bath for his calloused, dry feet. And then she kissed him. Over and over again. *And he welcomed it. Jesus welcomed the kisses of a whore.* She, the defiled, was cleaning Jesus, the pure.

Again, you have to ask yourself, "What was she thinking, pulling such a bold move? How did she think those men would respond? How did she think Jesus would respond? What was her hope? And where did she get the courage to do such a thing?" Clearly, this woman had come to the end of herself. Like an addict hitting bottom, she had died to everything but her desire for help. She ran to Christ, and he did not turn her away. **Grace begins where pride ends.**

The scene offended those who witnessed it. And it did not offend them because they were overly prudish or hyperreligious—although they probably were. Grace offends because it *is* offensive. **Unlike every other kind of love there is, one-way love does not depend on our loveliness. It precedes loveliness.** And while we see it mirrored in countless ways in our daily lives and relationships, the Gospel is the only place where we find this kind of paradigm-shattering grace in its pure, unadulterated state. Jesus is its starting point, and yet we must never forget that it got him crucified.

## ANOTHER LOST SOUL

Although it was shocking to the people in attendance, I am guessing that Jesus's response to this woman doesn't offend us much. Perhaps we feel sorry for the woman. Truth be told, in our day and age, it is not really the story of the immoral woman that is so shocking. It is Christ's interaction with Simon the Pharisee that gives us pause. Indeed, there was more than one person at that dinner party in need of saving.

We don't know why Simon invited Jesus to dine with him. Perhaps as a high-ranking member of the religious elite, he thought it was his social obligation. Perhaps he had a secret hope that Jesus was the Messiah and that he would be the first to herald him. Maybe he was suspicious and looking for a way to discredit Jesus in the eyes of his fellow villagers. Or perhaps he wanted Jesus to see how righteous *he* was and to honor *him*. We don't know. We only know that Simon was not overly welcoming to Jesus when he arrived, refusing to offer him the customary gestures of cleansing water, a kiss, or anointing oil. But like every other encounter Jesus had with the uninitiated, we know that Simon's life was about to be completely inverted. What might have begun as a search for a flattering word, a burning curiosity, or an embellished reputation ended up demolishing everything Simon thought he knew about God.

Simon's assumption, of course, was that if Jesus knew this woman was immoral, he wouldn't let her near him. But there was another, more insidious assumption hidden in his presuppositions: *She's different from me. She is a sinner, and I am not.* It probably never crossed his mind that Jesus had to condescend to come into *Simon's* house just as much as he did to receive this woman's kisses. **Simon's problem was that he thought he didn't have a problem.** Not surprisingly, this is what we call *pharisaism*. The miracle is that Jesus had great love for this self-righteous zealot and was determined to rescue him:

And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7:40–50)

Three sentences. One question. Complete annihilation. Neither debtor was able to repay their debt. So, the debt, if it was to be addressed at all, had to be cancelled via the generosity of the money-lender. It is as if the Lord said, "Simon, you're the primary debtor here. I have cancelled your great debt, but your love for me is paltry, because you don't think you owe me much. And when it comes to real righteousness, true obedience, you, a student of the Law, know that love from the heart is all that ultimately matters. What you do not understand is that right now, this immoral woman is more righteous than you are, because she loves and you don't. *You need to learn from her.*"

Learn from *her*? On this side of the story, it's nearly impossible for us to understand the shock and offense that Simon must have felt. Simon's discomfort at this point was obvious by his equivocating answer: "Well ... I suppose ... the one who had been forgiven for much loved much..." This man, who just one moment ago thought he had all the answers, was now hedging.

But once Jesus had begun, he wouldn't stop until Simon was completely undone. In lawyerlike fashion, Jesus proceeded, point by point, through all of Simon's breaches of hospitality. Simon hadn't been gracious with Jesus, because he had a falsely high view of himself. Perhaps he thought Jesus should have been grateful! Simon did not know himself. He thought he had no need of grace. He was enamored with his own "righteousness."

Then, in case Simon thought he should have just been a bit more courteous to his guest, Jesus forgave the immoral woman's sin. This act left Simon completely speechless. The Bible doesn't tell us anything more about Simon, but one thing we can safely assume is that he was never the same. The rescue project had begun. Perhaps he found rest for his troubled conscience in the grace of the Savior who welcomed the kisses of both harlots and Pharisees, or perhaps he spent his days in despair and self-recrimination. I pray it was the former.

## STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

As it did with Simon and Javert, one-way love upends our sense of fairness and offends our deepest instincts. We insist that reality operate according to the predictable economy of reward and punishment, especially when it comes to those who have done us harm. Grace is radically unbalanced. As Doug Wilson put it recently, "Grace is wild. Grace unsettles everything. Grace overflows the banks. Grace is not tame. In fact, unless we are making the devout nervous, we are not preaching grace as we ought."

The truth is, we all have a bit of the self-righteous older brother in the parable of the prodigal son inside us. Remember the elder brother? The one who worked for years and never outwardly disrespected his father but was incensed when his father welcomed his wayward younger brother back to the fold. The elder brother's reaction revealed that he had more in common with his sibling than he realized: neither of them loved the father. When the elder brother saw the father giving away part of the inheritance he thought he deserved, his true motivations became evident.

In the end, of course, the prodigal son was welcomed home while his older, self-righteous brother stood alone in the courtyard, fuming with bitterness. His offense at the grace his brother received stranded him out in the cold, away from the joyful celebration inside, **which is where the story leaves him.**



So, it often is with us. The storm may be raging all around us, our foundations may be shaking, but we would rather perish than give up our “rights.” We have worked too hard for that! Gerhard Forde puts it like this:

You see, we really are sealed up in the prison of our conditional thinking. It is terribly difficult for us to get out, and even if someone batters down the door and shatters the bars, chances are we will stay in the prison anyway!

There is no way around it: God’s one-way love is deeply offensive. Frightening even. So much so that if you’re not offended by it, you probably haven’t encountered the real thing. Grace turns our world upside down. It disrespects our values, pops the bubble of our self-righteousness, suspends reciprocity, and introduces chaos. It throws our to-do lists out the window.

## NOTES

1. Referring to himself in the third person in the preface to his book *The Toilers of the Sea*, dated March 1866, Victor Hugo wrote:

“A triple *ananke* (necessity) weighs upon us: the *ananke* of dogmas, the *ananke* of laws, the *ananke* of things. In *Notre-Dame de Paris* the author has denounced the first; in *Les Misérables* he has pointed out the second; in this book he indicates the third. With these three fatalities which envelop man is mingled the interior fatality, that supreme *ananke*, the human heart.” Victor Hugo, *The Toilers of the Sea* (New York: Heritage, 1961), 1.

2. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee (New York: Penguin, 1987), 1322–1325.

3. Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg. “Javert’s Suicide,” *Les Misérables: Cast Recording* (Decca, 1990).

4. Douglas Wilson, “Bones and Silicon,” *Blog and Mablog*, November 13, 2010, accessed July 15, 2013, [dougwils.com/s12-liturgy-and-worship/bones-and-silicon.html](http://dougwils.com/s12-liturgy-and-worship/bones-and-silicon.html).

5. Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 24.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tchividjian, T. (2013). [One way love: inexhaustible grace for an exhausted world](#). Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

**By its very nature legalism encourages hypocrisy because it defines a set of behavior that may cloak what is going on inside. I know of only two alternatives to hypocrisy: perfection or honesty. Since I have never met a person who loves the Lord our God with all her heart, mind, and soul, and loves her neighbor as herself, I do not view perfection as a realistic alternative. Our only option, then, is honesty that leads to repentance. As the Bible shows, God's grace can cover any sin, including murder, infidelity, or betrayal. Yet by definition grace must be received, and hypocrisy disguises our need to receive grace. When the masks fall, hypocrisy is exposed as an elaborate ruse to avoid grace.**

Everything they do is done for men to see ... they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'" Jesus' critique centered on what legalism does to the law-keeper: it fosters feelings of *pride* and *competition*. Instead of getting on with the task of creating a just society that would shine as a light to the Gentiles, the Pharisees narrowed their vision and began competing with each other. Caught up in trying to impress each other with spiritual calisthenics, they lost contact with the real enemy, as well as with the rest of the world. For all their strictness the Pharisees did not seem to resent the obligations of the law. They kept inventing new rules, after all. The Pharisees saw strictness as a means of achieving, of gaining status. Jesus condemned that pride, and also condemned the tiered spirituality that ranked some sins as acceptable (hatred, materialism, lust, divorce) and others as unacceptable (murder, adultery, breaking Sabbath rules).

We Christians have our own grouping of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" sins. As long as we avoid the most egregious sins, we feel pretty good about our spiritual status. The problem is, our understanding of egregious sins keeps changing. In the Middle Ages, charging interest was considered immoral, so much so that Jews were conscripted to do the dirty work. Nowadays Christians enjoy credit cards, home mortgage loans, and mutual fund accounts without a pang of guilt. The list of seven deadly sins included gluttony, envy, and spiritual sloth or "melancholy"—behavior that rarely attracts a sermon today. Jesus took an altogether different approach to sin. Rather than ranking sins as significant or less significant, he raised his listeners' sights to a perfect God, before whom all of us are sinners. We all fall back on the grace of God. Isaiah put it in earthy language: all our righteous acts, he said, are as "filthy rags," literally, "soiled undergarments." In an ironic way, blatant sinners have a kind of advantage when it comes to grace. The author Graham Greene used to say he had no excuse, no grounds on which to defend his (mis)behavior. Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son makes a similar point. The prodigal son had no leg to stand on, no possible basis for spiritual pride. By any measure of spiritual competition he had failed, and now he had nothing to lean against but grace. God's love and forgiveness extended equally to the virtuous elder brother, of course, but that son, too busy comparing himself to his irresponsible sibling, was blinded to the truth about himself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Yancey, P. (2009). [\*Where is god when it hurts/what's so amazing about grace?\*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

It is possible, warns the biblical writer Jude, to “change the grace of our God into a license for immorality.” Not even an emphasis on repentance erases this danger completely. At first a devious idea forms in the back of the mind. *It’s something I want. Yeah, I know, it’s wrong. But why don’t I just go ahead anyway? I can always get forgiveness later.* The idea grows into an obsession, and ultimately grace becomes “a license for immorality.”

Christians have responded to this danger in various ways. Martin Luther, intoxicated with God’s grace, sometimes scoffed at the potential for abuse. “If you are a preacher of grace, do not preach a fictitious, but a true, grace; and if the grace is true, carry a true, and not a fictitious sin,” he wrote his friend Melancthon. “Be a sinner and sin vigorously.... It is sufficient that we recognize through the wealth of God’s glory, the lamb who bears the sin of the world; from this, sin does not sever us, even if thousands, thousands of times in one day we should fornicate or murder.”

Others, alarmed at the prospect of Christians fornicating or murdering thousands of times in one day, have called Luther to task for his hyperbole. The Bible, after all, presents grace as a healing counterforce to sin. How can the two coexist in the same person? Shouldn’t we “grow in grace,” as Peter commands? Shouldn’t our family likeness to God increase? “Christ accepts us as we are,” wrote Walter Trobisch, “but when he accepts us, we cannot remain as we are.”

Twentieth-century theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the phrase “cheap grace” as a way of summarizing **grace abuse**. Living in Nazi Germany, he was appalled by the cowardly way in which Christians were responding to Hitler’s threat. Lutheran pastors preached grace from the pulpit on Sundays, then kept quiet the rest of the week as the Nazis pursued their policies of racism, euthanasia, and finally genocide. Bonhoeffer’s book *The Cost of Discipleship* highlights the many New Testament passages commanding Christians to attain holiness. Every call to conversion, he insisted, includes a call to discipleship, to Christ-likeness.

In the book of Romans, Paul bores in on these very issues. No other biblical passage gives such a focused look at grace in all its mystery, and for perspective on the scandal of grace we must turn to Romans 6–7.

The first few chapters of Romans have tolled a bell on the miserable state of humanity, with the damning conclusion: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Like a fanfare introducing a new symphonic movement, the next two chapters tell of a grace that wipes out any penalty: “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” Grand theology to be sure, but such a sweeping declaration introduces the very practical problem I have been circling around: Why be good if you know in advance you will be forgiven? Why strive to be Just As God Wants when he accepts me Just As I Am?

Paul knows he has opened a theological floodgate. Romans 6 asks bluntly, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” and again “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Paul gives a short, explosive answer to both questions: “By no means!” Other translations are more colorful: the King James Version, for example, has it, “God forbid!”

What absorbs the apostle in these dense, passionate chapters is, quite simply, **the scandal of grace**. The question “Why be good?” lies at the heart of Paul’s argument. If you know in advance you’ll be forgiven, why not join the bacchanalian pagans? Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow God will forgive. Paul cannot ignore this apparent loophole.

Paul's first illustration (Romans 6:1–14) speaks directly to the point. He poses the question, If grace increases as sin increases, then why not sin as much as possible in order to give God more opportunity to extend grace? Although such reasoning may sound perverse, at various times Christians have followed exactly that loopy logic. A third-century bishop was shocked to see devout martyrs of the Christian faith devote their last nights in prison to drunkenness, revelry, and promiscuity. Since martyrs' death would make them perfect, they reasoned, what would it matter if they spent their last hours sinning? And in Cromwell's England, an extremist sect known as the Ranters developed a doctrine of the "holiness of sin." One leader cursed for an entire hour in the pulpit of a London church; others got drunk and blasphemed in public.

Paul has no time for such ethical convolutions. To refute them, he begins with a basic analogy that starkly contrasts death and life. "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" he asks, incredulous. No Christian resurrected to new life should be pining for the grave. Sin has the stench of death about it. Why would anyone choose it?

Paul's vivid imagery of death versus life does not fully settle the question at hand, however, for wickedness does not always have the stench of death about it—at least, not to fallen human beings. Grace abuse is a real temptation. Flip through the ads in any current magazine and you'll see temptations toward lust, greed, envy, and pride that make sin downright appealing. Like farm pigs, we enjoy a good wallow in the mud.

Moreover, although Christians may have "died to sin" in some theoretical way, it keeps popping back to life. Paul, a realist, recognized this fact, or else he would not have advised us in the same passage, "*Count yourselves dead to sin*" and "*Do not let sin reign in your mortal body.*"

Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson performed a rather bizarre experiment on ants that may supplement Paul's illustration. After noticing that it took ants a few days to recognize one of their crumpled nestmates as having died, he determined that ants identified death by clues of smell, not visually. As the ant's body began to decompose, other ants would infallibly carry it out of the nest to a refuse pile. After many tries, Wilson narrowed down the precise chemical clue to oleic acid. If the ants smelled oleic acid, they would carry out the corpse; any other smell, they ignored. Their instinct was so strong that if Wilson daubed oleic acid on bits of paper, other ants would dutifully carry the paper to the ant cemetery.

In a final twist, Wilson painted oleic acid on the bodies of living ants. Sure enough, their nestmates seized them and marched them, their legs and antennae wriggling in protest, out to the ant cemetery. Thus deposited, the indignant "living dead" cleaned themselves off before returning to the nest. If they did not remove every trace of the oleic acid, the nestmates would promptly seize them again and return them to the cemetery. They had to be certifiably alive, judged solely by smell, before being accepted back into the nest.

I think of that image, "dead" ants acting very much alive, when I read Paul's first illustration in Romans 6. Sin may be dead, but it stubbornly wriggles back to life.

Immediately, Paul restates the dilemma in a subtly different way: “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (6:15). Does grace offer a license, a sort of free pass through the ethical maze of life?

“I suppose there’s some reason for keeping rules while you’re young ... so you’ll have enough energy left to break them all when you get old,” said Mark Twain, who valiantly tried to follow his own advice. Why not, if you know in advance you’ll be forgiven? Again, Paul lets out an incredulous “God forbid!” How do you answer someone whose main goal in life is to push the outer edges of the envelope of grace? Has such a person ever truly experienced grace?

Paul’s second analogy (6:15–23), human slavery, adds a new dimension to the discussion. “You used to be slaves to sin,” he begins, drawing a very apt comparison. Sin is a slave master that controls us whether we like it or not. Paradoxically, a headlong pursuit of freedom often turns into bondage: insist on the freedom to lose your temper whenever you feel anger, and you will soon find yourself a slave to rage.

For many, sin feels like a kind of slavery—or in modern terms, an addiction. Any member of a twelve-step group can describe the process. Set a firm resolution against yielding to your addiction, and for a time you bask in freedom. How many, though, experience the sad return to bondage.

Here is a precise description of the paradox from the novelist François Mauriac:

One by one the passions awake, prowl around and sniff at the object of their covetousness; they are attacking the poor undecided soul from the back and he is done for. How often has he got to be hurled into the ditch, to be stifled by the mud, to grasp at the edges and arise to the light again, to feel his hands give way and return again to the darkness, before he finally submits to the law of the spiritual life—the least understood law in the world and the one that repels him most though without it he cannot attain the grace of perseverance. What is required is the renunciation of the ego, and this is expressed perfectly in the phrase of Pascal: “Entire and sweet renunciation. Absolute submission to Jesus Christ and to my spiritual director.”

People may laugh and scoff at you for being unworthy of the title of free man and for having to submit yourself to a master.... But this enslavement is really a miraculous liberation, for even when you were free you spent the whole time forging chains for yourself and putting them on, riveting them tighter and tighter each moment. During the years when you thought you were free you submitted like an ox to the yoke of your countless hereditary ills. From the hour of your birth not one of your crimes has failed to go on living, has failed to imprison you more and more every day, has failed to beget other crimes. The Man you submit yourself to *does not want you to be free to be a slave*: he breaks the circle of your fetters, and, against your half-extinguished and still-smouldering desires, He kindles and re-kindles the fire of Grace.

In yet a third illustration (7:1–6), Paul likens the spiritual life to marriage. The basic analogy is not new, for the Bible often presents God as a lover pursuing a fickle bride. The intensity of feeling we have for the one person we choose to spend life with mirrors the passion God feels toward us, and God wants his passion returned in kind.

Far more than death, far more than slavery, the analogy of marriage provides an answer to the question Paul started with: Why be good? Really, that is the wrong question. It should be: Why love?

That reality helps me understand Paul’s gruff “God forbid!” response to the question “Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?” Would a groom on his wedding night hold the following conversation with his bride? “Honey, I love you so much, and I’m eager to spend my life with you. But I need to work out a few details. Now that we’re married, how far can I go with other women? I know it might hurt you, but just think of all the opportunities you’ll have to forgive me after I betray you!” To such a Don Juan the only reasonable response is a slap in the face and a “God forbid!” Obviously, he does not understand the first thing about love.

Similarly, if we approach God with a “What can I get away with?” attitude, it proves we do not grasp what God has in mind for us. God wants something far beyond the relationship I might have with a slave master, who will enforce my obedience with a whip. God is not a boss or a business manager or a magic genie to serve at our command.

Indeed, God wants something more intimate than the closest relationship on earth, the lifetime bond between a man and a woman. What God wants is not a good performance, but my heart. God wants me to serve “in the new way of the Spirit”: not out of compulsion but out of desire. “Discipleship,” says Cliff Williams, “simply means the life which springs from grace.”

If I had to summarize the primary New Testament motivation for “being good” in one word, I would choose *gratitude*. Paul begins most of his letters with a summary of the riches we possess in Christ. If we comprehend what Christ has done for us, then surely out of gratitude we will strive to live “worthy” of such great love. We will strive for holiness not to make God love us but because he already does. As Paul told Titus, it is the grace of God that “teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.” The best reason to be good is to want to be good. **Internal change requires relationship.** A person who truly loves God will be inclined to please God, which is why Jesus and Paul both summed up the entire law in the simple command, “Love God.” If we truly grasped the wonder of God’s love for us, the devious question that prompted Romans 6 and 7—What can I get away with? — would never even occur to us. We would spend our days trying to fathom, not exploit, God’s grace.

Author Keith Miller likens this [Dry Drunk] to a hypocrite in church, who changes the outside but not the inside. Real change, for the alcoholic as well as for the Christian, must begin with admitting the need for grace. **Denial blocks grace.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Yancey, P. (2009). [Where is god when it hurts/what’s so amazing about grace?](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

## **“Law and Grace”**

By Lindy McDaniel

Trying to harmonize the concepts of “law” and “grace” has been a difficult task for Bible students for hundreds of years. The difficulty primarily centers on the writings of Paul, and especially as students grapple with the problem of harmonizing Paul’s writings with those of James. Paul wrote: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law” (Rom. 3:28). However, James said: “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Some have concluded that salvation by God’s grace excludes obedience. Others maintain that one must obey God in order to be saved.

It is a dangerous practice to attempt to interpret some of the difficult writings of Paul apart from other scripture that hear on the same subjects. Peter warns: “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote, to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Pet. 3:14-17). Paul’s writings have been perverted, resulting in great harm.

## Salvation By Grace

Paul taught that salvation is by grace and not by works of law. He wrote: “Now to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteous” (Rom. 4:4-5). Again, “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under’ law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! ” (Rom. 6:14-15). “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom. 11:6). “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

## Salvation By Works

Salvation is also attributed to works in the following passages: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). “And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). Paul even emphasizes obedience in his great epistle on salvation by grace through faith written to the Romans: “. . . through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name’s sake” (Rom. 1:5). “For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil.... but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:19,26).



Evidently, Paul had no trouble reconciling “faith” and “obedience.” Also study carefully James 2:14-26, 2 Cor. 10:5; Gal. 5:7; Gal. 6:4; Phil. 2:12-13; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; 2 Thess. 3:14-15, etc.

## **Not Under Law**

Paul wrote that the Christians in Rome were not under law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Does this mean that Christians are not under any law whatsoever, or that obedience has nothing to do with justification?

Paul wrote much about “the law” or “law” and it is important to understand that he almost always had in mind the “law of Moses.” John wrote: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1: 17). Those addressed by Paul were familiar with the “law of Moses,” but they did not have access to all of the New Testament writings, which contain “the faith” revealed through Christ. The great controversy of apostolic days was whether or not the “law of Moses” was to be bound upon the Gentiles in order for them to be saved (see Acts 15:1, 6-11; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:1-3; 5:14). It is quite obvious that Christians are not under the Law of Moses; but this does not mean that Christians are without Law.

Furthermore, we are not under any law system that demands perfect obedience in order to be saved. The Mosaical Code was that kind of law system. Paul wrote: “For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘cursed is every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.’ Now that no one is justified by the law before God is evident; for, the righteous man shall live by faith.’ However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, ‘he who practices them shall live by them!’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-for it is written, I cursed is every one who hangs on a tree’ ” (Gal. 3: 10-13).

Law condemns every man who has sinned, and all men are convicted as lawbreakers; but Jesus Christ has delivered us from the curse of the law. Even though Christians are not under the Mosaical Code, or any law system that demands human perfection, we are under law to Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: “And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are under the Law” (1 Cor. 9:20-21). Paul, even though he was a Jew, did not consider himself to be under the law of Moses, but he was under law to Christ. Paul brought himself under the law, not as being necessary to salvation, but as a custom. However, he was bound by the law of Christ, which is also called “the law of liberty” (James 1:25).

The scriptures teach that all men are under the rule of Jesus Christ. Jesus said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). Paul wrote of Jesus Christ: “And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1: 15-17). “. . . who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to him” (1 Pet. 3:22). The whole world is under the authority of Jesus Christ.

If grace has released us from the obligation of law, as some contend, then it would be impossible for a Christian to sin, for “where there is no law, neither is there violation” (Rom. 4:15). “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4); but there can be no lawlessness unless there is a law.

But all men have been pronounced guilty before God (Rom. 3:23), and besides all of this, even Christians do sin: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Christians are not free from law. But they are free from the curse of the law through Jesus Christ. If and when they sin, they may gain forgiveness through the blood and advocacy of Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:7-10; 2:1-2).

## **Law And Justification**

Some argue, “Yes, the Christian is under law, but he is not under law as a basis of justification.” In answer to this, let us first realize that the principal foundation of justification before God is “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” God’s grace, and our justification, centers on Jesus Christ, the son of God (see 2 Cor. 5:19; 6: 1; 8:9; Heb. 10: 5-7; 10:10, 14, etc.). This fundamental fact being understood, the important question is simply this: “Must a person obey God in order to be justified by the blood of -Jesus?” To this question, I emphatically say, “Yes!” That obedience to Christ is essential to salvation is abundantly clear in scripture. Peter writes: “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). See also Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:17-18; etc.)

If a person is not under law as a condition of salvation, then his violation of law would not affect his salvation; yet the scriptures teach that the “lawless” and “ungodly” cannot inherit eternal life. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Tit. 2.11-13). “Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying” (Rev. 22:15).

A Christian may be “overtaken in a trespass” and need to be restored (Gal. 6: 1), or he may so sin as to lose his inheritance in Jesus Christ (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 6:4-8; Heb. 10:26-31; 2 Pet. 2:19-22). Thus, obedience has a direct bearing on our relationship with Jesus Christ. No, the Christian is not “free” from law.

Again, God will judge us according to our deeds done in the body. “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds” (Rev. 20:12). Read also Rom. 2:5-16; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; and I Peter 4:17.

## **Faith And Obedience**

Again, it is argued, “The Bible teaches that we are justified by faith apart from works of the law” (see Rom. 3:28; Rom. 4:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5-7, etc.). The “works” under consideration by Paul in these passages are those works which are meritorious in nature. By doing such works, a man may be said to have earned salvation. Since all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and continue to commit acts of sin (John 1:8), earning justification is rendered impossible. Justification is a gift and cannot be earned by human effort (Rom. 11:6). From these facts, some have foolishly concluded that it is not necessary to obey God in order to receive justification; but nothing could be further from the truth.

## **“Faith And Obedience”**

The gifts of God, although never earned by human effort, are frequently conditioned upon human effort. God healed Naaman, the Syrian Commander, of leprosy; but before this was accomplished, Naaman had to dip seven times in the river Jordan (see 2 Kings 5:10-14).

God gave Jericho into the hands of the Israelites, but it was required that they march around the walls a total of 13 times as prescribed by God (see Josh. 6). God gives us food and raiment; but these “good gifts” are not obtained apart from human effort. Apart from God’s grace, Naaman could not have been healed of leprosy; the Israelites could not have captured Jericho, and we could not be fed and clothed. These are simple but powerful illustrations of the grace of God. Do not be deceived into thinking that, “free gifts” cannot be conditioned upon human effort.

Salvation can be compared to a drowning man who is rescued. His small boat capsizes and sinks, and he is left helpless in the water unable to swim. A rescue boat approaches and a rope is thrown out to him. He grabs the rope and is pulled out of the water into the boat. He has been saved by the rescue men. Yet it was necessary for him to grab hold of the rope. Are you willing to “grab hold of the rope,” or do you foolishly think that God is going to do it all for you?

Our justification is conditioned upon faith. Human works of merit are centered on man, whereas faith is centered on God. Faith is the ground of our complete confidence in the unseen realm based upon the testimony of God (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1-2; Rom. 10:17). Faith is expressed in obedience to God (Heb. 11: 4, 7, 8, 17, 24, 27; James 2:14-28). Thus, the Christian “walks by faith” (2 Cor. 5:7).

Again, it is protested, “Justification is based upon faith alone, and not obedience!” “Of course,” they reason, “faith always produces good works.” This is like trying to separate cause and effect or the tree from its fruits. Such distinctions have resulted in much confusion. Faith is perfected through works (James 2:22). The tree is always known by its fruits (Matt. 7:26). How can a man know that he has faith unless he is willing to do what Christ commands? Faith apart from works is dead (James 2:26).

Those who emphasize the necessity of “faith” while denying the necessity of “obedience” are making a serious mistake. Faith apart from works has no more power to save than works apart from faith. Inward perfection is no more possible than outward perfection. The concepts of salvation by “faith only” and salvation by “works only” are both “legalistic” in that attention is centered upon man himself. But genuine faith is centered upon God. This kind of faith does not question God’s grace, purposes, or plan of human redemption. It is a trusting and obedient faith. It never argues around God’s law; it seeks only to obey it. What kind of faith do you have?

Some preachers among us are beginning to accept “denominational” concepts of “grace” and “love.” They are teaching that justification is conditioned upon faith apart from obedience to the laws of Jesus Christ. They admit that baptism is included in the “principle of faith” as a condition of salvation; but they deny that “observing all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded” is embraced by the principle. It is said that obedience to Christ inevitably flows from faith, but it is faith itself that saves. With the exception of baptism being included in the principle of faith, this is what many “denominations” have been teaching for hundreds of years. Are we ready for this?

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# Are We Under Law or Grace?

By Wayne Jackson

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**Why do some insist that Christians are under law today? We are not under law, but grace. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus (Jn. 1:17).**

We must respectfully point out that the question recorded above reflects a serious misunderstanding of the nature of both law and grace. And it misrepresents the nature of the religious system to which men are amenable today.

It is a tragedy of enormous magnitude that some, waving the banner of grace, argue that they are free from the constraints of sacred law and thus are at liberty to forge their own route along the religious terrain.

One cannot but be reminded of Jude's indictment of certain persons who pervert God's grace to accommodate their own sensual goals (Jude 4).

## John 1:17 — Law and Grace

The beloved apostle records these words in John 1:17:

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Here, the terms "law" and "grace" are employed to designate the **predominate systems** of divine, written revelation—namely the two covenants.

The first covenant was that given through Moses at Sinai, commonly known as the law of Moses. The second was a universal covenant for mankind that issued from Jesus Christ, and was ratified by the Lord's death (Mt. 26:28).

Jeremiah referred to these respective systems as “the covenant” that Jehovah made with the fathers when he brought them out of Egyptian bondage, and the “new covenant” which later would be world-wide in scope (Jer. 31:31-34). The writer of the book of Hebrews referred to these laws as the first and the second (Heb. 8:7), or the old and the new (Heb. 8:13).

In the text under review (Jn. 1:17), the two covenants are designated respectively as “law” and “grace.” And there is a very logical explanation for these appellations. It has to do with the **prevailing themes** characteristic of these systems.

The function of the Mosaic law was as follows:

1. To demonstrate that the violation of divine law separates the perpetrator from God (Isa. 59:1-2).
2. To declare that written law is needed to define sin (Rom. 7:7).
3. To show, by recorded precedent, that sacred justice requires that a penalty be paid for law-breaking (Rom. 3:26; 1 Cor. 10:5ff).

On the other hand, the dominant design of the New Covenant is to stress the **redemptive mission** of Christ as the only remedy for the human sin problem (Mt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 15:3). The wonderful plan of salvation is the result of Heaven’s grace (Eph. 2:8-9), not human merit. No richer term, than that of grace, could be employed as a synecdoche (the part put for the whole) for the summation of God’s thrilling scheme of redemption.

It is entirely reasonable, therefore, that these two systems should be set forth in a contrasted fashion, such as law and grace.

## **Abusing the Text**

It is a baffling mystery as to how anyone, with even a cursory knowledge of Scripture, should not understand that there was an abundant measure of grace under the law of Moses.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord long before the Mosaic system was birthed (Gen. 6:8), but it was not the modern sort of cheap grace that disavows obedience (Gen. 6:22; cf. Heb. 11:7).



Scores of Old Testament passages stress the pouring out of Jehovah's grace in ancient times upon those who responded in obedience to his will (cf. Ex. 33:13; Dt. 7:12; Jer. 31:3).

It is no surprise that many today are ready to repudiate the idea that man is responsible to sacred law. Outlaws despise law!

The reality is, this irresponsible suggestion — that folks today are “under grace” as **opposed** to law — is so trifling that it would scarcely be worthy of a rebuttal were it not for the fact that it is so common.

The notion has absolutely no sanction in Scripture.

### **No Law Today?**

Were it the case that man is not under law in this era of time, then it would follow necessarily that **sin would not exist today**, for sin is a transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4). As Paul once noted, where there is no law, there is no sin (Rom. 4:15).

By way of contrast, since it obviously is the case that men (even Christians) do sin in this era (1 Jn. 1:8—2:2), the compelling implication is that there is a divine law to which men now are amenable.

### **The Christian-era Law of God in Prophecy**

The Old Testament prophets, in previewing the coming of the Christian age (“grace”), spoke of a time in which the **law of God** would be **obligatory**.

Isaiah, for instance, spoke of the days of the new covenant, when Jehovah's “law” would go forth from Zion (Is. 2:2-4). The term “law” renders an original term suggesting “instruction” considered as a “rule of duty” (Young 1965, 106).

Similarly, when Jeremiah spoke of the “new covenant” (Jer. 31:31ff), he made it the equivalent of God's law, which would take up residence in man's heart (Jer. 31:33).

## A King Is on His Throne

When Jesus Christ is repeatedly depicted as a king in the biblical record, clearly the concept is set forth that he exercises an **authority** to which men are expected to comply.

If this is not law, there is no meaning to such terms as king, rule, reign, submit, obey, etc. (see Mt. 2:2; 28:18; Lk. 19:14, 27; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:9-10; Heb. 5:9; Rev. 1:5; 19:16).

## Law Respected By Apostles

The inspired writers of the New Testament viewed the authority of the regime of Christ as one of law.

Our freedom from the condemning effect of sin is the result of our submission to the “law of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:2). The expression “law of the Spirit” is the same as the gospel, the new covenant system.

It is “of the Spirit” because it was conveyed by the Spirit’s direction. It is designated as law because it is an “expression of the divine will” and a “rule of conduct” (Lard n.d., 247).

Elsewhere, Paul acknowledged that he was “under law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). Additionally, to the Galatians he gives this admonition:

Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the **law of Christ** (Gal. 6:2).

Finally, if the inspired James is not referring to the present order of things, when he alluded to the “perfect law” (Jas. 1:25), of what was he speaking?

## Conclusion

A consideration of the foregoing facts ought to enable the conscientious Bible student to see John 1:17 in a balanced light.

Furthermore, it should forever banish the absurd notion that our modern world is exempt from the restraints of sacred law.

# *Saved by Grace Versus Earned by Works*

## **IF GOD REQUIRES ANYTHING OF US AS BELIEVERS, HOW IS THAT GRACE?**

### **GOOD WORKS ARE THE FRUIT OF OUR FAITH**

What is the place of good works in the New Testament under grace? According to the universal testimony of all New Testament writers, our good works are the proof and fruit of our faith.

Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles that they “should repent and turn to God and do works proving their repentance” (Acts 26:20). And in one of his greatest expositions of grace in the Bible (Eph. 2:1–10) he wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them” (vv. 8–10). Grace and works go hand in hand, with our good works being the natural expression of God’s gracious work in our lives.

In keeping with this teaching, Paul wrote to Titus:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, righteously, and in godliness in this present world, as we await the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for Himself a special people, zealous of good works.

—TITUS 2:11–14

There you have it again: grace results in good works, which is why Paul urged Titus to remind his hearers “to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work” (Titus 3:1, ESV). A person can teach grace and call on God’s people to live godly lives and do good works. It is not either-or; it is both-and.

Jacob (James) confirmed this as well, writing:

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well” —but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”

—JAMES 2:14–18, NLT

Now, returning to the first question, how is this different from the Sinai covenant? There are actually many pronounced differences between life under the Sinai covenant and life under the new covenant:

- Under the Sinai covenant there were perpetual sacrifices for our sins; under the new covenant there was one, once-for-all sacrifice made.
- Under the Sinai covenant righteousness came by the deeds of the Law; under the new covenant righteousness comes by faith in the Messiah.
- Under the Sinai covenant God spoke with terrifying fire in the midst of a dark cloud; under the new covenant He speaks to us face-to-face through His Son.
- Under the Sinai covenant only the high priest could enter the holiest place (the holy of holies in the tabernacle or temple); under the new covenant every believer has direct access to the holy of holies in heaven.
- Under the Sinai covenant there were blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience; under the new covenant we begin with every spiritual blessing in Christ stored up for us in heaven.

But this is what is so fascinating. According to Hebrews, because we have been given so much under the new and better covenant—that’s a major theme of the book—much more is required from us. Can I share with you what the author of Hebrews wrote? It is clear that he had quite a grasp on the meaning of grace as well:

Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution [he is speaking here of the Sinai covenant], how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation [he is speaking here about salvation by grace]? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

—HEBREWS 2:1–4, ESV

Exhortations like this are found throughout Hebrews, including these strong words from Hebrews 10. Will you read them prayerfully, asking God to make these verses real to you? Anyone who despised Moses’ law died without mercy in the presence of two or three witnesses. How much more severe a punishment do you suppose he deserves, who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded the blood of the covenant that sanctified him to be a common thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine,” says the Lord, “I will repay.” And again He says, “The Lord will judge His people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

—HEBREWS 10:28–31

Because so much has been given to us at such a high cost—the blood of God’s own Son, not the blood of an animal sacrifice—much is required of us. Please don’t call this “legalism” or “dead religion.” To do so is to insult the Spirit of grace and to make light of the price God paid to save you and me.

Hebrews addresses this once more in a remarkable passage that contrasts life under the Sinai covenant with life under the new covenant. You will be surprised by the application, which I will highlight in the text when we reach it.

First, the author of Hebrews describes what Israel experienced at Mount Sinai. It was terrifying indeed:

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and storm, and to the sound of a trumpet and to a voice speaking words, such that those who heard them begged that the word not be spoken to them anymore. For they could not endure that which was commanded: “If so much as a beast touches the mountain, it must be stoned or thrust through with a spear.” So terrible was the sight that Moses said, “I am terrified and trembling.”

—HEBREWS 12:18–21

Next, he contrasts that experience with our experience as believers under grace: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven; to God, the Judge of all; and to the spirits of the righteous ones made perfect; and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant; and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better than that of Abel.

—HEBREWS 12:22–24

What an incredible difference!

Then he draws the conclusion, giving this exhortation: “See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused Him who spoke on earth, much less shall we escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven” (Heb. 12:25).

Now, you might not like this, and it may not make you feel comfortable, but the goal of these words is not to comfort us; it is to make us sober. Don’t play games with grace! (As for comfort, there are thousands of other verses that bring comfort and assurance, and we drink them in too.)

So enjoy the amazing, incredible, almost indescribable depths of God’s grace expressed through Jesus, and by that same grace walk worthy of your high calling in the Lord. Since we are God’s own workmanship (Eph. 2:10; the New Living Translation actually says we are His “masterpiece”), let’s live this out to the full. As Paul also wrote, “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph. 5:8–10, ESV).

That really says it all. Let’s walk as children of light!<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Brown, M. L. (2016). [\*The grace controversy: answers to 12 common questions\*](#). Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House.

## Grace—The Basis of Justification

Grover Stevens

**IN EPHESIANS 2:8–9 THE INSPIRED WORD of God tells us: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”**

That salvation from sin is by God’s grace is positively affirmed and clearly stated by the inspired apostle (Ephesians 2:1–3), and then to make sure that there be no misunderstanding he adds negatively that salvation is “not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” The word “grace” means not deserved or unmerited. The word “gift” indicates something received without compensation, unearned. It is abundantly clear that God’s grace alone is the founding stone on which man’s salvation from sin rests.

### By God’s Grace—Through Man’s Faith

However, this passage also informs us that this grace saves us “*through faith*.” The apostle Paul says in Titus 2:11–12, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to *all* men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” If our salvation is solely by grace on God’s part and there is nothing that man can do to receive that gift of God’s grace, then *all men will be saved* and we would have universal salvation. But the apostle Paul tells us that we become the recipients of God’s saving grace “*through faith*.” The eminent Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson, says in commenting on this passage: “*Through faith*: This phrase he adds in repeating what he said in verse 5 to make it plainer. ‘Grace’ is God’s part, ‘faith’ ours. *And that (kai touto)*: Neuter, not feminine *taute*, and so refers not to *pistis* [faith] (feminine) or to *charis* [gift] (feminine also), but to the act of being saved by grace *conditioned on faith on our part*.”

### “Not of Works”

When Paul says “not of works” he does not mean that there is nothing that man can or must do, as some loudly insist. There are four classes of works revealed in the New Testament: **(1) The works of the Law of Moses**, by which man cannot be justified as it demanded perfect obedience (Galatians 2:16–21; Acts 13:39). **(2) The works of man’s own righteousness**, works commanded by men (Colossians 2:21–23; Titus 3:5; Romans 10:1–3; 1 John 3:12; Acts 7:41). Obviously, these are works of man’s own devising. Such teaching as “join the church of your choice” or “worship in the way of your choice” or “believe in the faith of your choice” or “live good (keep the ten commandments) and you will go to heaven” are all included in this class. **(3) The works of Satan, darkness, and the flesh** (1 John 3:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Romans 13:12; John 7:7; Galatians 5:19ff). Certainly we are not saved by any of these kinds of works.

### Working God's Righteousness

The fourth kind of works are the **works of God, faith, and righteousness**. In John 6:29 the Lord Jesus said, "This is the *work of God*, that *ye believe* on him whom he hath sent." Clearly, *faith* is a work, and is a work that we must work in order to receive God's gift of grace, salvation. Galatians 5:6 says the faith that avails is the "faith which worketh by love." And James 2:26 tells us that "faith without works is dead." In Acts 10:34–35, the inspired apostle Peter says, "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and *worketh righteousness*, is accepted with him." 1 Thessalonians 1:3 speaks of "your *work of faith*." Philippians 3:9 says, "And be found in him, *not* having my *own* righteousness, which is of the law, but that ... *righteousness which is of God by faith*." Romans 10:1–3 teaches that salvation is not by the establishment of our *own* righteousness, but by *submission unto the righteousness of God*. Romans 5:1–2 teaches that it is "by faith" that we "have access into this grace wherein we stand" (are saved); and verse 21 says that "grace reigns through righteousness."

### No Cause To Boast

God's grace provided Christ and the gospel. In the gospel God has revealed His righteousness or commandments (Psalm 119:172) These commandments are faith, repentance, confession, baptism and godly living. When man has submitted to (obeyed) all of these, he still has done nothing of merit nor of which he could boast. He has done no works of his own righteousness, but has simply submitted to the righteousness of God—God's conditions of acceptance (Acts 10:35). His salvation is merely by the grace and mercy of God (Titus 3:5).

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6130 Lynnhaven Drive, Lubbock, TX 79413<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Stevens, G. (1984). [Grace—The Basis of Justification](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 20.

## Grace And Works

By [Mike Riley](#)

Some in the church have a denominational view of [Ephesians 2:8-9](#). This writer does not question their sincerity, but their understanding and knowledge. A clear statement of their position is, “We do not contribute one whit to our salvation” (Rubel Shelly, quoted in Yokefellow, vol. 18, no. 4, p. 3). They take the phrase, “not of works” ([Ephesians 2:9](#)) as the main emphasis that destroys any other understanding of the passage. Salvation comes, they teach, by grace only. If “we do not contribute one whit to our salvation”, then there is nothing for man to do. He is entirely passive in the salvation process, and God is sole actor. If anyone is saved, it is the independent act of God. If anyone is lost, it is God’s fault & He alone is to blame.

## Grace Referred To In Past Tense

In the scriptures, grace is referred to in past tense. [Titus 2:11](#) says, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” Grace “happened” for all men. The grace referred to by Paul in this passage is not something that comes to each saved man as the future unfolds, but it is some **past favor**. The apostle points back to the cross when the Lamb of God died for the sins of the world. If there is nothing for man to do, then salvation is universal, because Jesus died for all ([John 3:16-17](#); [Romans 5:6-21](#)).



## God Created A Plan Or Process Of Salvation

Notice again in [Ephesians 2:8](#), “For by grace are ye saved....” This blends with the revealed expression of divine sovereignty. God creates a plan. He created a process of salvation. Grace reveals the plan to all men to either receive or reject through faith ([Romans 10:17](#); [Acts 28:23-24](#)). The phrase, “obedience of faith” ([Rom. 16:26](#)) assumes a sovereign God. He established a plan and determined that those submitting to the plan receive salvation. It is certain that if God has a plan, He follows that plan.

## God’s Plan Affirms Man’s Free Will

God’s plan of salvation affirms the free will of man. God does not ban free will. He grants it! The plan of salvation demonstrates that those who follow the plan “shall be saved” ([Mark 16:16](#)). Man cannot compel God to save him. Salvation is “not of works lest any man should boast” ([Ephesians 2:9](#)). The plan comes from God’s will and not by man’s works which he devises. Paul did not want men to think they had done some “great thing” by which they forced God to save them. Salvation is by grace (the plan made known – [Titus 2:11-12](#)). It is also by submission to God. Elsewhere Paul calls it “obedience of faith” ([Rom. 16:26](#)). The saved man does not boast ([Ephesians 2:9](#)) but submits to God’s plan of salvation by grace through faith ([Romans 10:16-17](#)).

## Conclusion

Those who abuse [Ephesians 2:8-9](#), making the phrase “not of works” mean any works – any activity, takes the passage out of its biblical context and promotes what Paul condemns. They accuse the Bible of teaching salvation by works when it only teaches God’s plan of salvation, which really declares salvation by grace. Paul says our salvation is by grace through faith. Saving faith requires obedience to every law of God ([James 2:14-26](#)). We do not obey our own plan of salvation but God’s plan of salvation revealed by His grace. Therefore, there is no boasting. Truth is the word of God understood ([Romans 12:2](#); [Ephesians 5:17](#)). God’s sovereign will says, “I have a plan”. God’s grace is included in that plan.

## **The Grace and Mercy of God**

### **Is God's Grace Conditional or Unconditional? How Does Mercy Relate to Faith, Works, and Law in the Bible?**

**What blessings do God's grace and mercy offer us? Does the Bible say that gifts given by the grace of God are necessarily unconditional? Does salvation by grace through faith eliminate our need to meet conditions such as repentance, confession, baptism, and faithful living? Is the grace of God extended only to a few predestined people unconditionally elected before the world began? How do grace and mercy relate to works, law, and obedience in the Bible? Can we earn salvation? If not, does that eliminate the need for obeying commands to be saved? What does the Bible teach?**

Introduction:

One of the most important and beautiful Bible themes is the grace and mercy of God. No one can honestly claim to be familiar with the Bible and yet deny man's need for grace.

*Like most other important Bible doctrines, this one has become a focus of controversy.*

\* Universalism claims God's grace will save everyone.

\* Catholicism says the church hierarchy (clergy) dispenses God's grace through sacraments. Hence, men must confess to the priest to be forgiven, etc.

\* Calvinism says God's grace is extended only to a limited, predestined few whom God unconditionally chose, regardless of their will, character, conduct, etc. And once God saves one of these elect, he can never fall from grace and be lost.

\* Protestant denominations generally teach salvation by "grace alone" and "faith only," so a man is saved on the basis of his attitude toward God only. Obedience is not necessary.

\* Some members of conservative churches teach that obedience is necessary to become a child of God, but after that one will remain in grace so long as he has a "good attitude," regardless of the fact that he continues to disobey God's word. Hence, they conclude we should not rebuke such people, but fellowship them despite their errors.

*The purpose of this study is to present a foundational study of the gospel teaching about God's grace and mercy.*

We will not consider in depth all the alternative views just listed. We will, however, give basic information that can be used to examine those views in more depth.

Consider some basic definitions:

"Grace" - "...good-will, loving-kindness, favor ... kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved ... NT writers use (grace) pre-eminently of that kindness by which God bestows favors even upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their offences, and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ ..." - Grimm-Wilke-Thayer. Hence, grace is "unmerited favor."

"Mercy" - "... kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them..." - Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

So both grace and mercy involve kindness and favor toward those in unfortunate circumstances. Mercy emphasizes the wretched and miserable circumstances of the object of mercy, whereas grace emphasizes that they are unworthy or undeserving of favor.

[Bible passages regarding grace show that all three in the Godhead express mercy: the Father (Rom. 1:7; etc.), the Son (Rom. 16:20; etc.), and the Spirit (Heb. 10:29).]

In this study we will consider the following topics about God's grace:

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## Part 1 - What Does God's Grace Offer to Men?

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Why do we need grace? What can it do for us?

### A. God's Grace Offers Us Forgiveness of Sins.

Ephesians 1:7 - In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His **grace**. Note the importance of Jesus' blood in grace. Men ought to die eternally for our sins. But God's grace provided a sacrifice to die for us, so we do not have to die.

Ephesians 2:8 - For by **grace** you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. "Save" means to rescue or deliver from harm or danger. Sin endangers our soul by dooming us to eternal punishment, but God offers deliverance. We do not deserve deliverance, so it is not of ourselves, but is a gift of God. Hence it is of **grace** - unmerited favor.

Titus 3:3-7 - By God's kindness, mercy, and grace, He saved and justified us. "Justify" means to declare one to be right or just - to pronounce one to be what he ought to be. We do not merit or deserve such a right standing before God on the basis of the deeds we have done. On the contrary, we have all sinned (Rom. 3:23), and sin deserves death (Rom. 6:23).

So based on our deeds, we all ought to be punished eternally. But God sent His Son to die for us so we can have eternal life instead - a gift we surely do not deserve. That is supreme grace or "unmerited favor." We ought to fall on our knees every day to thank God for it.

However, none of this proves we can be saved without doing anything. It does mean that nothing we do could ever *earn or merit* forgiveness.

[Titus 2:11-14; Rom 3:23-26; Luke 1:76-78; 2 Tim. 1:9; Acts 15:11; 20:32; Rom. 5:12-21; 4:2-8; 1 Tim. 1:13-16; 1 Peter 1:3-16]

### B. God's Grace Offers Us Fellowship with God.

Sin alienates or separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Forgiveness by grace reunites us into God's fellowship.

Romans 5:1-2 - Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God ... we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. We are no longer enemies of God.

Ephesians 2:1-5,11-13,18,19 - Salvation by grace (v5,8) changes us from being dead in our sins (i.e., separated from God - v12), to being made alive (made nigh or reconciled so we have access to Him). This makes us His children, members of His house or family (v19).

Suppose someone repeatedly mistreated you and acted as an enemy. Would you want him in your family? Would you allow your son to die so that one could enter your family? That is what grace led God to do for us. [1 Peter 2:9,10]

### C. God's Grace Offers Us All Spiritual Blessings.

2 Thessalonians 2:16,17 - God loved us and gave us eternal **comfort and good hope** through grace.

Romans 5:1,2 - We have access to grace, so we **rejoice in the hope of glory**.

2 Timothy 2:1 - Be **strong** in the grace in Christ.

2 Corinthians 9:8 - God's grace makes us **all-sufficient in all things**, so we can abound in **all good works**. It provides all spiritual blessings we need to serve God.

[Psalm 84:11; 1 Peter 4:10,11; Rom. 12:6; Heb. 4:14-16; 2 Thess. 1:11,12; Acts 20:32]

### **D. God's Grace Offers Us Eternal Life.**

Titus 3:7 - Having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Acts 20:32 - The word of His grace is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

1 Peter 1:3,4,7 - By God's mercy we are begotten to a living hope reserved in Heaven ... praise, honor, and glory at Jesus' revelation (v7).

Who can search his life and honestly say he deserves such blessings as these? Yet God offers them anyway. That is "unmerited favor."

[1 Peter 5:10; 1 Tim. 1:13-16; Jude 21]

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## **Part 2 - How Can We Learn About God's Grace?**

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The doctrines of men regarding grace overflow with speculation.

Calvinists claim the Holy Spirit will act directly on man's heart, apart from the gospel, to give him "irresistible grace."

Others say, "Surely the grace of God will cover the sins" of a certain person or group. I ask, "How do you know that? Do you have a passage that says so?" Unable to provide such a passage, people nevertheless speculate endlessly.

How do we know what grace will or will not do? Do we have the right to say God's grace will cover certain sins, when we have no Scripture that says so?

### **A. The Only Means by Which Man Can Learn Anything about God's Grace Is the Gospel.**

There is no other way to know what grace will or will not do, or whom it will or will not save.

Ephesians 1:5-11 - We become God's sons according to God's **will** (v5). We have forgiveness according to His grace, which He made to abound to us, having made known to us the mystery of His **will**, according to His good pleasure which He **purposed** in Himself (v9). We inherit according to His **purpose**, and He works all things according to His **will** (v11).

Note that, in all these things, God's grace works according to His **will & purpose**. The one who extends favor has the right to decide how and to whom he will extend it.

A major point of Ephesians is that the mystery of God's will is **revealed** in the Scriptures (3:3-5; 1:9). Scriptures provide us to all good works (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Therefore, the only way to know anything about God's grace is through God's word!

2 Timothy 1:8-10 - God saved and called us according to His **purpose and grace**, revealed in Christ who brought life and immortality to light through the **gospel**. God's grace operates according to God's purpose. But the gospel reveals God's purpose. So if we want to understand grace, we must study the gospel!

We have no right to assume (let alone to teach) that God's grace will do anything except what the gospel says it will do. We must not expect it to save any except those whom His word says it will.

Acts 15:11 - Jews are saved by God's **grace** in the **same manner** as Gentiles. Note that God's grace saves in a certain **manner** - there is a way it operates. Further, His grace saves **all** men in the **same** manner. How do we know the manner in which Gentiles (and therefore all men) were saved?

V7 - Gentiles heard the **word of the gospel** and believed.

11:14 - Peter spoke to them **words** whereby there were saved (cf. 10:33-48). No one will be saved by direct operation of the Spirit apart from the word. Grace saves through the word.

Acts 20:24,32 - Paul's ministry was to testify the **gospel of the grace** of God. His preaching commended them to the **word of God's grace** (v32). Note the connection between grace and the word. The only way to understand grace is to learn of it through the word. [vv 20,21,25,26; 14:3]

Galatians 1:6-9 - We are called in Christ's grace. But if we follow another **gospel**, we remove ourselves from Him who called us in grace. If we preach another gospel, we are accursed. To receive the benefits of God's grace, we must follow the gospel. To follow other teachings removes us from grace. [5:4]

Titus 2:11,12 - The grace of God has appeared **teaching** us how to live. God's grace teaches! To know about grace, we must be taught. How can we be taught? By God's only revelation, the Scriptures.

[Col. 1:5,6; 1 Peter 5:12; 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:2; Gal. 6:16; John 1:17; Acts 4:33; Eph. 3:2-8]

## **B. What God's Grace Is Said to Do for Men, the Gospel Is Also Said to Do.**

This confirms what we just learned. What grace does, it does through the gospel.

*Note the connection in the following areas:*

### **Calling**

2 Timothy 1:9 - We are called according to grace. [Gal. 1:6]

2 Thessalonians 2:14 - We are called by the gospel.

### **Teaching**

Titus 2:11,12 - The grace of God appeared to all men teaching us.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 - The Scriptures teach & instruct us and provide us to all good works.

### **Producing faith**

Acts 18:27 - Disciples believed through grace.

Romans 10:17 - Faith comes by hearing God's word [John 20:30,31]

### **Saving**

Ephesians 2:5,8 - By grace are you saved. [2 Tim. 1:9; Acts 15:11]

Romans 1:16 - The gospel is God's power to save. [James 1:21; Acts 11:14]

### **Strengthening**

2 Timothy 2:1 - Be strong in the grace of Christ. [2 Thess. 2:16,17]

Colossians 1:9-11 - Be filled with knowledge of God's will that we may be strengthened with all might. [Acts 20:32; Rom. 16:25,26]

### **Giving eternal life**

Titus 3:7 - Being justified by grace, we are heirs of the hope of eternal life.

John 6:63,68 - Jesus' words are the words of eternal life.

### *Some applications*

When we teach that people who practice sin must repent and obey God to be saved, some people say we are "playing God," "putting ourselves in the place of God," or "limiting the grace of God." Yet those people sometimes say, "I just believe the grace of God will cover those people." The issue is: What does the Bible say? The only way to learn what God's grace will or will not do is to know what the word says.

If the Scriptures say that people who practice sin need to repent to please God, then we are not playing God when we preach that. We are simply teaching the word of God's grace: we are telling them what God says they must do to receive His grace!

If people say that God will save people who are practicing sin, but they cannot find a Scripture that so teaches, then why aren't *they* are the ones who have put themselves in the place of God? Why is it that only those who rebuke sin seem to be accused of "playing God"?

John 1:17 - Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. There is no conflict between grace and truth; they work together.

John 17:17 - But God's word is truth. So grace works according to God's word.

Only God can say what His grace will cover, and the only way to know is by what He says in the Bible. Whether we extend God's grace where His word does not extend, or whether we limit His grace where the word does not limit it, either way is equally "playing God." What we need is less speculation about grace and more "Thus saith the Lord."

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## Part 3 - Is Grace Conditional or Unconditional?

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Religious folks disagree about whether grace is received conditionally or unconditionally.

Conditional grace means that, in order to receive forgiveness and in order to continue to receive the blessings that result from it, there are certain things a person must do. Whether or not one receives grace depends on his individual choice, how he acts, thinks, speaks, etc.

Unconditional grace means that forgiveness and resulting blessings are granted to individuals regardless of their choice or conduct. God grants them grace entirely on His own determination without consideration of their will, desires, or actions.

Here are a few of the many Scriptures to be considered. For other Scriptures please see our study of election and predestination at our Bible Instruction web site at <https://www.gospelway.com/instruct/>.

### A. General Examples of Conditional Grace

People often confuse **conditional** blessings with **merited** blessings. Since we cannot earn forgiveness, they conclude there can *be no* conditions. They say it is a denial of grace to say one must do anything to receive forgiveness.

But the Bible contains many examples of people who received God's blessings by grace, yet they had to meet conditions. Those who met the conditions received the blessings. Had they failed to meet the conditions, they would not receive the blessings. Nevertheless, meeting the conditions did not **earn** the blessing, so it was still a matter of grace.

#### *The fall of Jericho - Joshua 6:1-20*

V2 - God said He had **given** Jericho to Israel. Some say salvation is a gift, so we can do nothing to receive it (Eph. 2:8,9). But Jericho was also a gift. Did they have to do anything to receive it?

Vv 3-5 - To receive the gift, the people had to march around the city once each day for six days and seven times on the seventh day, blow horns, and shout. When they did so, the walls fell.

Consider some questions:

\* Was this a **favor** from God? Yes, it was His gift (v2).

\* Did marching, etc. **earn** the gift? No, marching does not merit the destruction of a walled city. This was unmerited favor - a blessing they did not earn - hence, they received it by grace.

\* But were there **conditions** the people had to meet to receive the gift? Yes. Would they have received it if they had not met the conditions? No. Hence, conditional grace!

Hebrews 11:30 - This very example illustrates the kind of faith we need to please God and be saved under the gospel system of grace (cf. 10:39; 11:6). Just as Israel's faith required obedience in order to receive God's gift by grace, so our faith requires obedience in order to receive the gift of salvation by grace. But it is still grace, because the conditions do not *earn* the gift.

***The cure of Naaman - 2 Kings 5:9-14***

Elisha told Naaman to dip 7 times in Jordan and his leprosy would be cured (v10). Naaman eventually did as he was told and was cured (v14). Questions:

- \* Was this a **favor** from God? Yes.
- \* Did dipping **earn** the gift? No, dipping 7 times in any river would not deserve the removal of leprosy. This was unmerited favor, hence grace.
- \* But were there **conditions** Naaman had to meet to receive the gift? Yes. Would he have received it if he had not met the conditions? No. Hence, conditional grace!

Grace can be conditional! The fact a person must do something does not necessarily contradict the concept of grace. Specifically, if dipping in water can be a condition for removing leprosy, yet it is still a gift by grace, then why can't dipping in water (baptism) likewise be a condition for removing of sin, yet it is still a gift by grace?

***Gideon's defeat of the Midianites - Judges 7:1-22***

With only 300 men, Gideon defeated an innumerable host of Midianites. Questions:

- \* Was this a **favor** from God? Yes. God said **He saved** Israel (vv 7,9).
- \* Did Israel **earn** the blessing? No, They held torches, blew trumpets, and shouted, but this would not deserve the defeat of such an army. This was unmerited favor, hence grace.
- \* But were there **conditions** Israel had to meet to receive the gift? Yes, they had to surround the enemy, hold torches, blow trumpets, and shout. Would they have received it if they had not met the conditions? No. Hence, conditional grace!

Note v2: God deliberately arranged this so the people **could not claim glory for themselves saying their own hand had saved them**. Yet there were still conditions they had to meet.

Note the parallel to Ephesians 2:8,9, a passage which teaches that salvation is a gift by grace, not of ourselves or of works. Many say this means there is nothing for us to do to receive salvation.

But note:

<b>Israel &amp; Gideon (Judges 7)</b>	<b>Our salvation (Eph. 2:8,9)</b>
saved from Midian	saved from sin
a gift from God	a gift from God
by grace	by grace
not earned by human hands	not earned by human works
man cannot glory	man cannot boast
conditions (obedience) required	conditions (obedience) required

***Noah's salvation from the flood - Genesis 6***

Vv 7,8 - Was Noah saved by grace? Yes, he found **grace** in the eyes of the Lord - unmerited favor. [Note: Prov. 3:24 uses the same word for "grace," but that verse is quoted in James 4:6, where the New Testament word for "grace" is used to translate it.]

Vv 13-15,22; 7:5 - Did Noah have to do anything to be saved by grace? Yes, he built the ark and did all that God commanded. Would he have been saved if he had not built the ark? No. Hence, conditional grace.

Hebrews 11:7 - Again, this very example is cited to teach us how we are saved from sin by faith (10:39; 11:6). The Old Testament example illustrates New Testament salvation by grace through faith, and both require meeting conditions. [1 Peter 3:20,21; Rom 15:4]  
[Other Bible examples of conditional grace: Exodus 17:1-6; Numbers 21:6ff; Genesis 19:19; Hebrews 11]

### ***Examples of conditional grace in everyday life***

\* A radio announcer offers a valuable prize to the seventh person to call in. This is a favor (gift) not earned, but conditions must be met to receive it.

\* A person's will grants one million dollars to an heir provided he is married, lives in a certain place, or meets some other requirement.

\* A donor gives a million dollars to a college if it names a building after him.

Grace can be conditional. The fact one must do something to receive a gift does not mean he earns it and does not disprove it is a gift by grace.

## **B. The Universal Nature of New Testament Grace**

We have proved that grace can be conditional. The existence of conditions does not eliminate grace. Consider now New Testament grace and specifically the grace by which God saves or forgives men of their sins. Is that grace conditional or not? Note first the universal nature of grace.

### ***Scriptures***

Titus 2:11 - For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

Romans 11:32 - God has mercy on all, just as many as were in bondage to sin.

Hebrews 2:9 - By the grace of God Jesus tasted death for everyone. God wants all to be saved, so Jesus died for all (1 Tim. 2:4,6; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9; Mark 16:15,16).

Romans 2:11 - God is no respecter of persons.

[Acts 10:34,35; 15:11 Rom. 5:15-21]

### ***Observations***

#### **This fact destroys Calvinistic unconditional election and limited atonement.**

Strict Calvinism denies that God's grace is truly available to all or that Jesus truly died for all. It says Jesus' death offers saving grace only to those whom God unconditionally chose before the world began. All others are lost and cannot receive grace.

But the above passages contradict this view by proving that God's grace is extended to all and Jesus died for all. The Calvinistic view of grace makes God a respecter of persons by saying that grace and the benefits of Jesus' death are extended only to a few regardless of their choice or conduct.

#### **Further, these verses leave only two choices:**

(1) If God's grace is unconditional, then ***all people will be saved***, since His grace extends to all. This is universalism, but it contradicts passages showing many will be lost (Matt. 7:13,14,21-23; 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; etc.).

(2) The only other alternative is that salvation by grace is received ***conditionally***. It is offered to all, but each individual must choose whether or not he will meet the conditions. Hence, God is no respecter of persons for He offers salvation to all. Yet many will be lost, because they refuse to meet the conditions.

The only way to harmonize the Bible teaching that God's grace is for all and that God is not a respecter of persons with the fact that many will be lost is to recognize that grace is conditional. Now consider Bible examples that confirm this.



### C. Gospel Examples of Salvation by Grace

Were people who were saved by grace under the gospel required to meet conditions? In particular, was baptism a necessary condition to their forgiveness of sins?

#### *Jews*

Acts 15:7-11 - Jews ("we") are saved through grace "in the same manner" (NKJV & ASV, "even as" - KJV) Gentiles ("they"). **Grace saves in a certain manner or way. That manner is the same for all, Jew or Gentile.** What is that manner? Is it conditional or not?

Note first the Jewish converts in Acts 2:36-41.

Acts 2:14,38 - Peter **spoke** to them. They had to be told what to do. Grace works according to God's revealed word, not in some mystical speculative way.

V36 - They had to know assuredly (**believe**) in Jesus.

V38 - They had to **repent and be baptized for remission of sins**. 3000 did so (v41).

Did these Jews earn salvation? No more so than did Naaman, Gideon, Noah, etc. The work done did not earn the gift received. But was obedience necessary to receive the gift? Absolutely.

Hence, conditional grace.

#### *Gentiles*

Acts 15:11 says Jews and Gentiles would be saved in the same manner. So consider the conversion of Cornelius, the first recorded Gentile convert.

Acts 11:14; 10:33ff - Cornelius was required to **hear words** whereby he could be saved. He gathered with his friends to **hear** what Peter would say. [15:7]

10:43 - Peter said people must **believe** to receive remission. Later, he retold the event saying they **heard the word of the gospel and believed** (15:7). So their hearts were cleansed by **faith** (15:9).

11:18 - God granted the Gentiles **repentance** unto life.

10:34,35 - Those who **work** righteousness are accepted by God.

10:47,48 - In telling them words whereby they could be saved, Peter commanded them to be **baptized** in water.

Jew and Gentile are saved by the grace of God in the same manner. It is conditional, and the conditions are always the same! And those conditions include baptism.

#### *Paul*

1 Timothy 1:13-16 - Paul was saved by the **grace** of God, and he was a **pattern** for others who believe for eternal life. Further, he is the apostle who emphasized the doctrine of salvation by grace. So was his own salvation a pattern of conditional or unconditional grace?

Acts 9:1-6 - Paul had been a persecutor, but Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus' road. He told him to go into the city to be **told what he must do**. There were things he **must do**, and he had to be **told** them. (Clearly he believed and repented at this point.)

9:18; 22:16 - There he was baptized because the man God sent to tell him what to do said to be **baptized and wash away his sins**.

Paul, the apostle who taught salvation by grace, himself was saved by conditional grace, including baptism to have his sins washed away.

#### *The Romans*

Romans 5:1,2 - The book of Romans is an essay on salvation by grace through faith under the gospel. Was the salvation of the Romans conditional or unconditional? We are justified by **faith** because, by **faith**, we have access to grace. [3:22-26; 4:2-8,14-16; 10:14]

1:16; 10:17 - The **gospel** is God's power to save all who **believe**. **Faith** comes by **hearing God's word**.

1:5; 16:26 - But, as with all other examples so far, this must be an **obedient faith**. What specific obedience is required?

2:4-10 - God's goodness leads men to **repent**. Those who will not repent, will receive wrath at judgment.

10:9,10 - One must have **faith** in his heart, but it must be obedient faith, for one must **confess** with the mouth to be saved. If grace was unconditional, then neither faith nor confession would be needed.

6:3,4,17,18 - To be made free from sin one must **obey** the teaching delivered. This includes baptism, since in **baptism** we come into Christ and into His death, so we walk in a new life (born again).

Paul's essay on salvation by grace shows that grace is conditional, and the conditions include baptism. Forgiveness is a gift we do not deserve, but one must meet the conditions to receive it.

### ***Ephesians***

Ephesians 2:5,8,9 - The Ephesians themselves ("you") are an example of salvation by grace through faith. So let us examine their conversion. Was this conditional grace or unconditional?

1:7,13 - They were forgiven by grace after they **heard the word of truth** and **believed**. Paul told the Ephesian elders that in Ephesus he had testified to the **gospel of God's grace** (Acts 20:24,27,32). We are saved by grace through **faith** (Eph. 2:8,9). But faith is a condition one must meet to be saved. If grace is unconditional, why is faith needed? [Acts 19:8,10]

Acts 20:20,21 - Paul taught, not just faith in Jesus, but also **repentance** toward God. [19:8,19]

Acts 19:5 - As a result of Paul's preaching, men were **baptized**.

### ***1 Peter 3:20,21***

Noah was saved by grace, but it was conditional. He had to obey, but his obedience did not earn his blessing.

Specifically, water separated Noah (who received grace) from those wicked people who were condemned. This illustrates our salvation by grace because, in our case too, water is essential to our salvation. **Baptism saves us.**

The power is not in water to save, nor does baptism earn salvation. The power is in Christ's death and resurrection. But when we have obedient faith, as Noah had, so we meet the conditions of salvation, then we are saved by grace through faith, even as Noah was.

[Acts 18:27; 8:22; John 1:12-17; Gal. 5:4-6; Titus 3:3-8; Heb. 12:14,15]

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## **Part 4 - What Is the Relationship Between Grace, Law, and Works?**

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Since God's word is truth (John 17:17), and truth never contradicts itself, we know there are no contradictions in the Bible. However, many people are confused about grace because some passages appear to them to be contradictory.

Consider some examples:

We are saved by grace through faith, not of works (Eph. 2:8,9) But we are justified by works, not by faith only (James 2:24)
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Again,

If salvation is of grace, it is not of works (Rom. 11:6) But He who fears God and works righteousness is accepted before Him (Acts 10:35)
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And,

We are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14)  
Yet Paul said he was "under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21).

[See also Titus 3:3-7; 2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 4:5]

One reason people are confused about such matters is that they study only part of what the Bible says and do not put it all together. Another reason is that people ignore passages that seem to teach different from what they have believed and been taught. So they may study certain passages that teach about grace but then ignore other passages. The result is confusion. If the Bible does not contradict itself, there must be harmony. Let us study Bible teaching about grace, law, and works, taking passages on all these concepts and putting them together.

### **A. Different Uses of Terms**

Studying various passages will show us that the same word can have different meanings in different contexts. One reason people are confused is that they assume a word has one certain meaning, then they try to force that meaning on all contexts.

Examples in this study are:

#### **Grace**

Grace means unmerited favor - a blessing or gift that one receives, though it is not earned by the one who receives it. But the same word can refer to different kinds of grace.

\* **Unconditional grace** in which one receives a favor but has no choice in the matter. The favor is given regardless of the choice, character, life, or conduct of the receiver.

\* **Conditional grace** in which a gift is offered, but to receive it one must do certain things or act in certain ways. God's grace makes the gift available, but the person has the power to choose to do or not do whatever is required to receive it. Yet what is done does not earn the gift.

Either of these definitions can fit the meaning of grace. Only context tells what is meant in a particular instance. Many people assume grace must be unconditional, but this leads to false conclusions because, as we have already proved, the grace of the gospel is conditional.

#### **Law**

Law simply means a command, rule, or precept (or a collection of commands) that a person is expected to obey. But again the New Testament mentions several different *kinds* of law.

[Everyone obeys some law - Rom. 6:16,19.]

\* **The law of sin** - Romans 7:23 [7:25; 8:2]. This is the principle by which one obeys his own will or the will of someone else other than God (actually he is obeying Satan). Note that 7:22,23 says this law is different from the law of God.

\* **The law of works** - Romans 3:27. Note that this is different from the law of faith. The Law of Moses is an example of a law of works. When we study more about this kind of law later, we will see that the gospel is *not* this kind of law.

\* **The law of Christ** (Galatians 6:2), also called "law of faith" (Rom. 3:27), "law of God" (Rom. 8:7), "law of the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2), or "law of liberty" (James 1:25; 2:12). 1 Cor. 9:20,21 says this is a law, but it is not the (Mosaic) law that the Jews were subject to.

Again, all of these fit the definition of law, but they are different laws. Only the context tells which is meant in a particular case.

Often people become confused because they assume that there can only be one kind of law. They read passages saying we are not saved by a law of works (like the Old Testament), then they assume this means there is no law at all involved in our salvation. When we realize there are different kinds of laws, then we see how we may *not* be saved by certain kinds of laws, yet there still may be a kind of law that is necessary to our salvation.

#### **Works**

Works means deeds, actions, things a person does. But again there are different *kinds* of deeds mentioned in different contexts in the New Testament.

\* **Works of the flesh** - Galatians 5:19-21. These are acts that violate God's law and are therefore sinful (this is parallel to the law of sin). These works do not save but rather condemn us. [Rom. 13:12-14]

\* **Works of the law** (or works of human righteousness) - Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:28 [Titus 3:5]. These are deeds done as part of a "law of works." Again, we will discuss these at length later and will see that these cannot justify and are not the works of the gospel.

\* **Works of faith** or deeds done in obedience to the gospel - 1 Thessalonians 1:3 [Galatians 5:6]. These deeds result from faith as part of a law of faith. These are done, not to earn a gift, but to meet conditions to receive a blessing one does not deserve. [1 Cor. 15:58; John 6:28,29] Again, all of these fit the definition of works, yet they are different kinds of works. Only context can tell which is meant in a particular case.

But people read passages saying we are not saved by works, then they assume this means that no deeds of any kind are involved in our salvation. But when we realize that the gospel mentions different kinds of works, then we understand that, though there are kinds of works which do not save us, yet other kinds of works may still be essential to salvation.

This is the solution to the problem of apparent contradiction between passages. Some verses say we are not saved by works of law, yet others say we are saved by works and must submit to law to be saved. The only possible solution is that the passages are discussing different kinds of law and different kinds of works.

## **B. Does the Gospel Include Law (Commands) and Works (Obedience)?**

Many denominations, in order to belittle the importance of obedience (especially baptism), have denied that the New Testament is a law. They deny that obedience in any form is essential to salvation.

Some members of "institutional" and even some "conservative" churches ones are making similar statements. I once heard a preacher say, "The New Testament is not a code of laws. It is a group of love letters."

Like most false doctrines, this contains just enough truth to camouflage the error. The implication is that love is important, but obedience is not essential. So they conclude that, when church members disobey the Bible, if they seem sincere, we should love them so much we will overlook their disobedience and continue to fellowship them. If we insist people must repent, some folks call us "legalists," and accuse us of trusting commandment keeping for salvation.

### ***Is law an essential aspect of the New Testament?***

We agree that the New Testament is not a system of justification by works of law. But is law in any sense an essential ingredient of the gospel?

Galatians 6:2 - We must **fulfill the law of Christ**. Christ has a law, and we are expected to fulfill it.

1 Corinthians 9:20,21 - Paul was "**not without law to God, but under law to Christ**." Some people say we are not under law at all. Paul denies this. He was not under the law Jews were subject to (law of Moses), but this did not mean he was without law. He was still under law to Christ.

Isaiah 2:2,3 - When God established His house (the church - 1 Tim. 3:15), **God's law would go forth from Jerusalem**. [Acts 2; Luke 24:47]

James 2:8 - Love your neighbor is the **royal law**. If obedience to law is not required under the New Testament, then love is not required, for **love is a law!** Love and law do not necessarily

conflict. To say love eliminates law is to misunderstand both love and law. [Cf. Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14]

1 John 3:4 - **Sin is transgression of law.** If we are not subject to law, then there can be no such thing as sin. If we are not required to obey law, then it would not matter if we commit sin. Those who claim we are without law are in effect defending sin, for the essence of sin is lawlessness (NKJV).

Yet all people commit sin (1 John 1:8,10; Rom. 3:23). And sin is what we need God's grace to forgive (Eph. 1:7). If obedience to law is not necessary, then sin is not a problem, and we would not need grace to forgive our sins. **To eliminate law is to eliminate our need for grace!**

Folks who say we are not under law, have denied our need for grace. To say obedience is not essential is to belittle our need for grace and for Jesus' death.

[Heb. 8:10; Rom. 3:27; James 1:25; 2:8,12]

### *Are works an essential aspect of the gospel?*

Again, we agree that there is a sense in which we are not justified by works of law. But does this mean that no works of any kind are in any way necessary for us to be saved?

Galatians 5:6 - In Christ Jesus what avails is faith **working** through love.

Acts 10:34,35 - In every nation, he who fears God and **works** righteousness is accepted.

James 1:22,25 - Be **doers** of the word, not just hearers. If one is a **doer** of the **work**, he is blessed in what he **does**.

James 2:14-26 - Can one be **saved** by a faith that does not **work** (v14)? Such a faith is dead.

Works and faith go together, so by **works** a man is justified and not by faith only.

Romans 2:6-10; 2 Corinthians 5:10 - We will be judged and rewarded in eternity for our **works**.

We receive eternal life for **well-doing, working** what is good.

[John 6:28,29; Phil. 2:12; John 5:28,29; 1 John 2:17; 1 Thess. 1:3; Acts 9:6]

### *Are commands an essential aspect of the gospel?*

By definition, a law is a command or collection of commands. Those who belittle law also belittle the importance of keeping commands. But note passages showing how important commands are:

Matthew 22:37-39 - Love for God and man are the greatest **commands**. To say we must love is to say we must keep commands, for love is a command. To deny the need for obeying commands is to deny the necessity of love. [Note that comparing this passage to James 2:8 shows that law = command.]

John 14:15; 1 John 5:3 - If we love God, we will keep His **commands**. Love and commandment keeping are not antagonistic. They must go together. To say you do not believe commands are necessary is to admit you do not have a proper love! [John 14:21-24; 2 John 6]

1 John 2:3-6 - **To know and abide in God, we must keep His commands.** To say that command keeping is not essential is to admit you do not know God!

1 John 3:23 - **Faith is a command.** Those who say commands are not essential to salvation, are unintentionally saying that faith is not essential, for faith is a command.

Acts 17:30,31 - God **commands** all men everywhere to **repent**. To say that commands are not essential is to say that repentance is not essential, for repentance is a command. But God says that without it we will perish (2 Peter 3:9; Luke 13:3,5).

Acts 10:47,48 - **Baptism** in water is a **command**. But many passages show that it is essential to salvation (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Rom. 6:3,4).

Most folks willingly accept that faith and repentance are essential, despite the fact they are commands. The main command people insist is unneeded is baptism. But commandment keeping

is either essential to salvation, or it is not. If keeping commands is not necessary, then love, faith, and repentance are not necessary. But if we admit keeping commands is necessary, then why oppose the necessity of baptism?

[Matt. 28:18-20; John 12:47-50; 1 Cor. 14:37]

***Is obedience an essential aspect of the gospel?***

Again by definition, law is simply that which should be **obeyed**. If law is not necessary under the gospel, then neither is obedience. But if obedience is necessary, then so is the law.

Romans 6:17,18 - Having just said that we are not under law but under grace, Paul says we are **made free from sin when we obey** the doctrine delivered.

Hebrews 5:9 - Jesus is author of eternal salvation to all who **obey Him**.

Matthew 7:21-27 - To enter the kingdom of heaven, we must **do** the will of the Father. It is not enough just to learn Jesus' teaching or claim to believe Jesus is Lord.

1 Peter 1:22 - We purify our souls in **obeying** the truth.

2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 - Those who do not **obey** the gospel will be punished in flaming fire.

[Rom. 1:5; 16:26]

It is true that the gospel is not a system of justification by works of law, yet it is also true that the gospel is a law in which works and obedience to commands are essential to receive salvation.

But remember that words like "law," "works," etc. can mean different things.

Let us study further to determine in what sense the gospel is a law that requires works and in what sense it is not a law of works. We will also see how all this harmonizes with grace.

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## **Part 5 - A Comparison of Two Systems of Justification**

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To understand the relationship between grace, faith, works, and obedience in salvation, let us study the gospel contrast between two systems of justification.

<b>Works of Law</b>	<b>Grace through Faith</b>
Sinlessly perfect lifetime	Sinner can be justified
Sins remembered	Lasting forgiveness
Must earn justification	Justification unearned
Based on man's effort	Based on Jesus' death
Man boasts in self	Glory goes to God
Man trusts self	Man trusts Jesus
No one is saved	All can be saved

### **A. Works of Law as a System of Justification**

One way "works of law" is used is to refer to a system or fundamental principle of justification: one stands righteous before God simply and entirely because he has properly kept commands. This is basically the kind of law the Old Testament was, and this is the kind of law the New Testament refers to when it says we are not saved by "works of law." The gospel is not a "law of works" in this sense.

Note some characteristics of works of law as a system of justification (many references here are speaking of the Old Testament law, but the principle would apply to any law of the same kind as the Old Testament).

***Justification by this system requires a lifetime of sinless perfection.***

To stand righteous before God at judgment, one would have to live his whole lifetime without ever violating any of God's commands.

Galatians 3:10-12 - One who does not continue in **all** things written in the law is under a curse. This is quoted from Deut. 27:26 and describes a law system like the Old Testament. Here people are not justified on the basis of forgiveness, but one must do everything the law commands so he never stands guilty. [James 2:10; Rom. 10:5; Lev. 18:5]

The only person who ever lived a sinless life under the law was Jesus (Heb. 4:15). To stand justified under such a law, one would have to live a sinless life like Jesus did.

***No permanent forgiveness was provided.***

Hebrews 10:1-4,11 - The law had animal sacrifices which could not permanently remove sin. Sins were remembered every year.

If a person ever sinned under such a system, that law of itself could never give lasting forgiveness. Such sinners could only hope that some other arrangement would come later to justify them. Jesus' death accomplished this - His blood reached back to give lasting forgiveness to those under the Old Testament (Heb. 9:15). But the law itself that those people lived under did not provide lasting forgiveness. Had Jesus not come and died, they would have had no hope. This is why justification under such a system required a whole lifetime of sinless perfection. If anyone ever sinned, he was under a curse of death (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:23), but the law itself could provide no lasting forgiveness. [Galatians 3:21]

"Works of law," as a system of justification, refers to ***law alone - without forgiveness***. One is justified under such a system entirely and only because he never did anything wrong.

***Justification must be earned by works of merit.***

Romans 4:4 - The only way to achieve righteousness under such a system would be to earn it as a matter of debt.

If a person lived a sinless life, he would earn righteousness. He would deserve for God to consider him right, because he never did anything wrong. God could not rightly punish him, because he did not deserve punishment. He is justified, not because his sins have been forgiven, but because he never committed any sins for which he needed forgiveness.

This is how "works" and "law" are used throughout the context of Rom. 4. Remember these words can also have other meanings; but the only meaning that could fit this context is sinless perfection, since this is the only kind of works that would earn righteousness as a matter of debt. Any man who sins deserves punishment (Rom. 6:23), so the only way to earn righteousness would be to never sin.

***The source or power behind justification would be human ability.***

Romans 4:4 - The person must save himself by his own goodness. If he ever does anything wrong, he can never be righteous; so he must rely on his own strength to live without sin. [Judges 7:2]

***Man can then boast in his own achievement.***

Romans 4:2 - If man deserved to be righteous because he never committed any sin, he could brag about his accomplishment [cf. Judges 7:2]. Again note that "works" here must refer to a life of sinlessness, for that is the only kind of works in which a man could boast of his salvation. If he ever sinned and needed forgiveness, he would have nothing to brag about.

***Man trusts in himself. Christ is not needed.***

If a man saved himself by a sinless life, he would not need forgiveness. Hence, we would not need to trust in Jesus' sacrifice. Obviously God knew men would not be saved on the basis of a sinless life, else why send Jesus to die? [Gal. 2:21; Rom. 4:14]

***Since all men sin, this system will save no one.***

Romans 3:20,23 - All are guilty of sin, therefore by works of law (a sinless life) no one will be justified. The law provided no means for lasting forgiveness, so the only way to be justified under that system was to live without sin. No one ever did this (but Jesus), so no one could ever be saved under that system.

In the end, what the law did accomplish was to prove to men that they were sinners who did not deserve eternal life (v20).

[Gal. 3:10-12; 2:15,16; Acts 13:38,39]

Passages, like those above, are often used to try to prove that acts of obedience (especially baptism) are unnecessary under the *gospel*. However, they prove no such thing, because "the law" in these contexts does not refer to the gospel, and "works of law" does not refer to obedience to the gospel conditions of forgiveness. Rather, these terms refer to a sinless life whereby one *earns* salvation, because he has never sinned. They refer to an entirely different system of justification than the gospel.

**B. Grace through Faith as a System of Justification.**

We earlier studied examples showing that the gospel is a system of salvation by grace through faith, yet it still requires obedience to conditions in order for a person to receive forgiveness.

Hence, it is conditional, yet it is still a system of grace.

Let us now summarize justification by grace through faith as a system of justification, contrasting it to works of law as a system of justification.

***A lifetime of sinless perfection is not required.***

Romans 3:23,24 - Under this system, even those who have sinned can be justified. Though we have sinned, yet we can be justified on the basis of forgiveness. That is grace (unmerited favor).

[Rom. 5:1,2; Titus 3:3,7]

***Lasting forgiveness is available to those who meet the conditions.***

Ephesians 1:7 - We have redemption and forgiveness through Jesus' blood according to grace.

[2:8,9; Rom. 4:5-7]

Hebrews 10:11-14,17 - Animal sacrifices could not completely remove sin. This is why they had to be repeated. But Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice, which removes sins so completely they are never again remembered.

We learned earlier that this forgiveness is offered to all men (Titus 2:11,12). But there are conditions men must meet to receive it. If one is not a child of God, those conditions include hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized (Acts 15:7-11; 2:38; 10:34-48; 22:16; Rom. 10:9-17; 6:3-18; etc.). For a child of God who sins, the conditions are repentance and prayer (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

***Justification by grace does not merit or earn forgiveness.***

Romans 4:4-7 - It is a matter of grace, not of debt. Again, "works" in this context must refer to a life of sinless perfection. That would earn justification without grace. [11:6; 6:14f]

But righteousness by grace means salvation for those who "work not" or "apart from works of the law." These "works" are the ones referred to in vv 2,4 (sinless perfection) [cf. 3:21,28].

Hence, justification by faith means, even though people have not lived a sinless life, yet they can be saved by grace.

V7 explains how this happens: it is by *forgiveness* of sins. If he kept the law without ever sinning, man would earn salvation by works of law. But if he sins and needs forgiveness, that requires grace.



Salvation by grace apart from works does not mean there are no commands to obey to be saved. Multitudes of other passages show we must obey the conditions of forgiveness. What it means is that we are saved by forgiveness, and therefore we have not earned salvation by a sinless life.

***The source or power that provides forgiveness is Jesus' death.***

Hence, salvation is based, not on human effort, but on Jesus' sacrifice (Eph. 1:7). [Eph. 2:8,9; Titus 3:5; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 3:24,25]

Forgiveness can be obtained only through the blood of Jesus. By the grace of God, Jesus died to offer us salvation. Hence, salvation is a gift, not based on or provided by human effort.

Again, all passages that say salvation is not of works or not of law mean that it is not achieved on the basis of human ability whereby man earns salvation by living a sinless life.

It is not the intent of such passages to deny that man must meet conditions to receive forgiveness.

The point is that man is not the *source* of the *power* on which righteousness is based. God is the source of the righteousness, because He forgives man's sins on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice.

***God receives the glory. Human boasting is excluded.***

Ephesians 2:8,9 - If someone had lived a sinless life and thereby earned salvation, then he could boast. But if a man has sinned and ought to be punished, but God by mercy offers him forgiveness, that man has forever forfeited his right to boast about his salvation. Instead, he should praise God for grace. [Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:29-31]

When passages like these warn against boasting, you know that the works being discussed do not refer to conditions whereby one is forgiven. There can be no boasting in forgiveness. So passages that warn against boasting must be warning against works of law whereby one earns justification by living a sinless life.

Specifically, passages that exclude works of boasting cannot possibly be excluding baptism. If a person is baptized for forgiveness, he cannot possibly have grounds for boasting. The whole point of baptism is to admit that the one being baptized is a sinner and has come with humble heart pleading with God to forgive him, not boasting about his human achievements. This is what Ephesians 2:8,9 and such passages are teaching. [Cf. Judges 7:2]

***Faith in Christ is required.***

Ephesians 2:8; John 3:16 - Under a system of justification by works, one who lived a sinless life would not need Jesus' death. He would have saved himself by trusting in human ability. But since no one will be saved that way, then everyone needs faith in Jesus. [Rom. 3:22,26; 4:24; Luke 18:9-14; etc.]

When one admits that he has sinned and needs forgiveness - when He comes pleading with God to forgive Him by Jesus' blood - then he is not trusting his own ability. When He meets the conditions that Jesus requires in order to be forgiven, then he is manifesting faith, not in himself, but in Jesus. That is exactly what salvation by faith requires!

When people today deny that obedience is necessary, they claim that they do this because they believe we are saved by the grace of God and faith in Jesus. Actually, they show that they do not understand what the Bible says about obedience, but neither do they understand what it says about grace and faith.

When people really trust in Jesus, they will do whatever He says to do to receive forgiveness!

When Jesus tells us what we must do to be saved but we deny we need to do that, then we show that we don't really believe in Him!

***This system of justification places salvation within the reach of all men.***

Acts 13:38,39 - Men could not be justified by the law of Moses, because it required a sinless life. Since all men sinned, such a system put salvation out of reach. [Acts 15:10,11]

Under the gospel, men can obtain forgiveness through Jesus in spite of their sins. That makes salvation available to everyone, because Jesus' died for everyone and everyone can meet the conditions.

The difference between justification by a system of works and justification by grace through faith is not that one requires obedience and the other does not. Both require obedience. In a nutshell the difference is that the first lacks lasting forgiveness and therefore makes salvation impossible for all who have sinned, whereas the second makes salvation available by offering real forgiveness of sin.

### **Conclusion**

When we properly understand the gospel teaching about grace, works, and law, we learn that we should not belittle the importance of God's conditions for receiving forgiveness. We should respect those conditions and obey them. Neither should we belittle the importance of living a pure life, since one of the conditions of forgiveness is repentance, which requires us to commit ourselves to living a pure life.

Having met the conditions for forgiveness, however, we must not become self-righteous as though we deserve to receive eternal life or have earned it by our own goodness. Rather, we must recognize we are sinners who deserve to be punished, yet by God's grace we have been forgiven and offered eternal life.

That is grace indeed, and ought to lead us to forever praise God for His grace and Jesus for His death.

<b>Works of Law</b>	<b>Grace through Faith</b>
Sinlessly perfect lifetime	Sinner can be justified
Sins remembered	Lasting forgiveness
Must earn justification	Justification unearned
Based on man's effort	Based on Jesus' death
Man boasts in self	Glory goes to God
Man trusts self	Man trusts Jesus
No one is saved	All can be saved

## Salvation by Grace Through Faith

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph.2:8)*

### FAITH

Working Faith (Jas.2:22) (Gal.5:6)

➔

*“We have access by faith into this grace”  
(Rom.5:1)*

## GRACE

*“Not by faith only” (Jas.2:24)*

**“FAITH ONLY”**



*“Faith without works is dead”  
(Jas.2:20)*

9

## Access by Faith Into This Grace

*“Not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph.2:8)*

**BY FAITH** *The Israelites looked at the bronze serpent (Num.21:8-9)*

**BY FAITH** *The Israelites marched around Jericho (Heb.11:30)*

**BY FAITH** *Naaman dipped 7 times in the Jordan river (2 Ki. 5:10-14)*

**BY FAITH** *The blind man washed in the pool of Siloam (Jn.9:7)*

➔

**“lived”**

**“the walls fell”**

## GRACE

**“clean”**

**“seeing”**

*“not by faith only” (Jam. 2:24)*

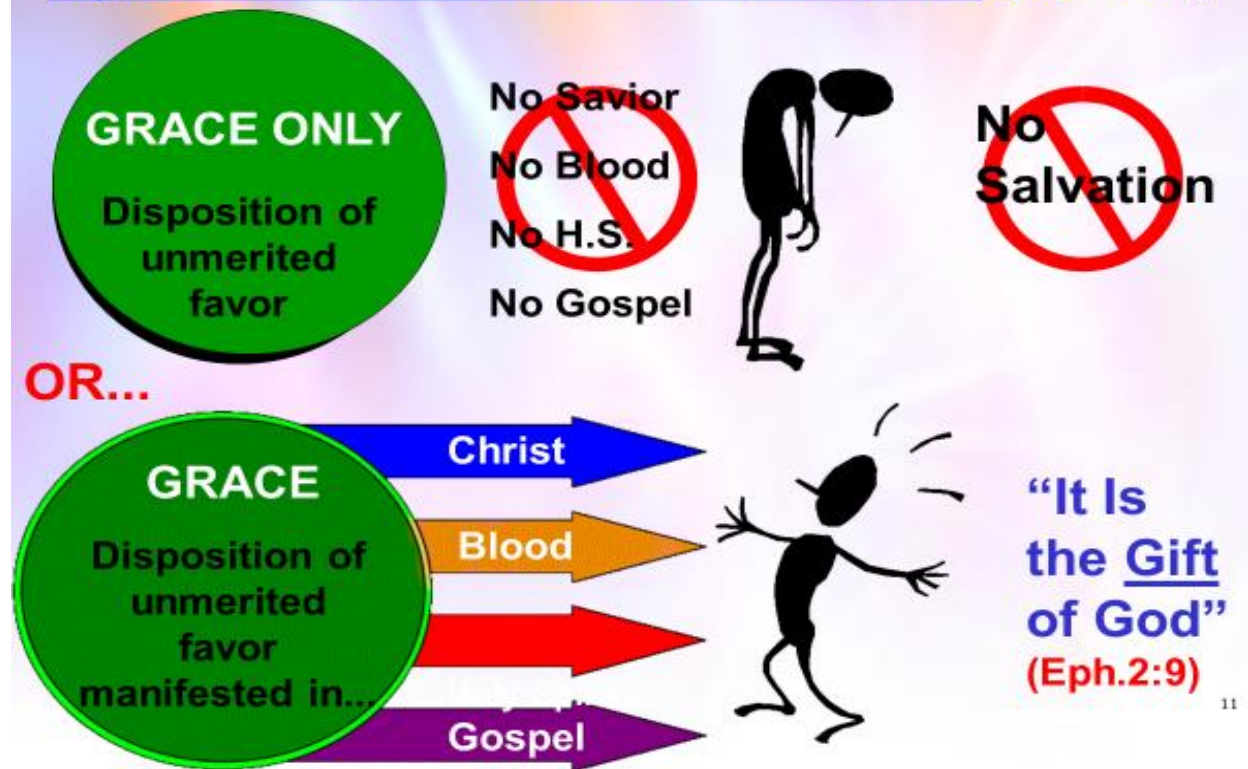
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*“not by faith only” (Jam. 2:24)*

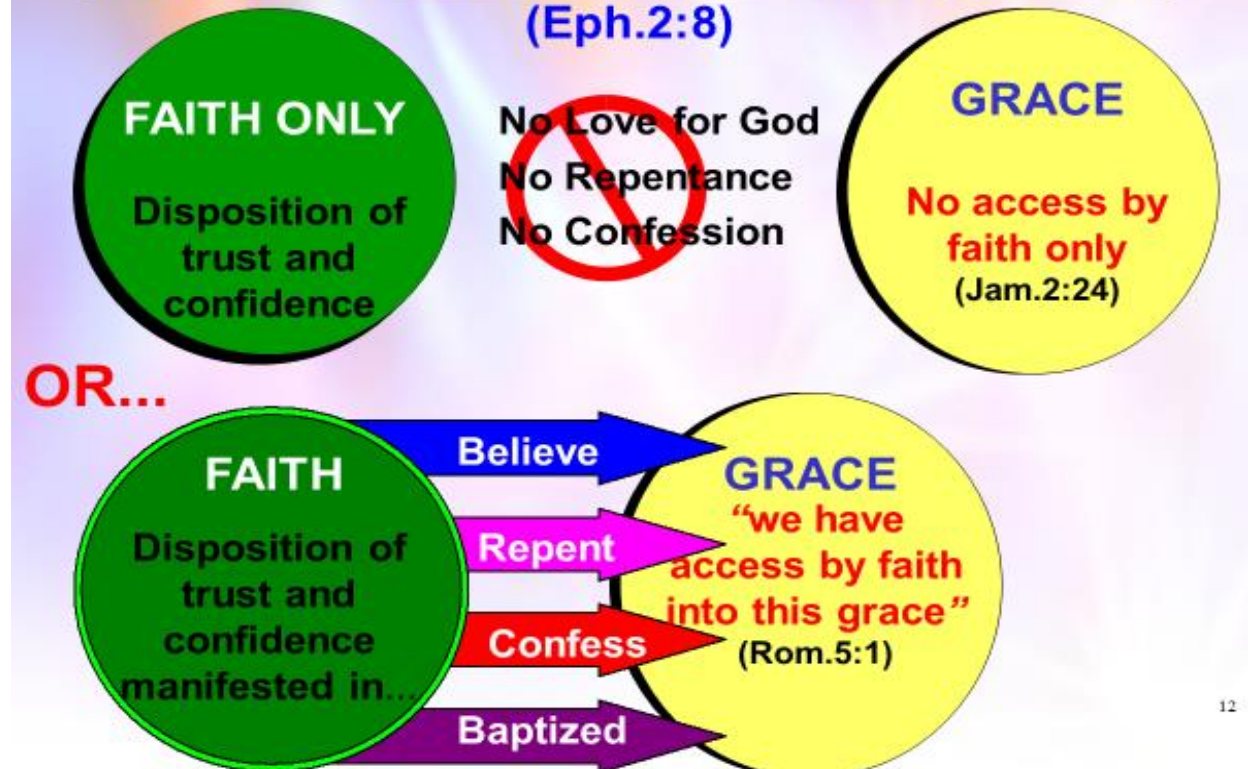
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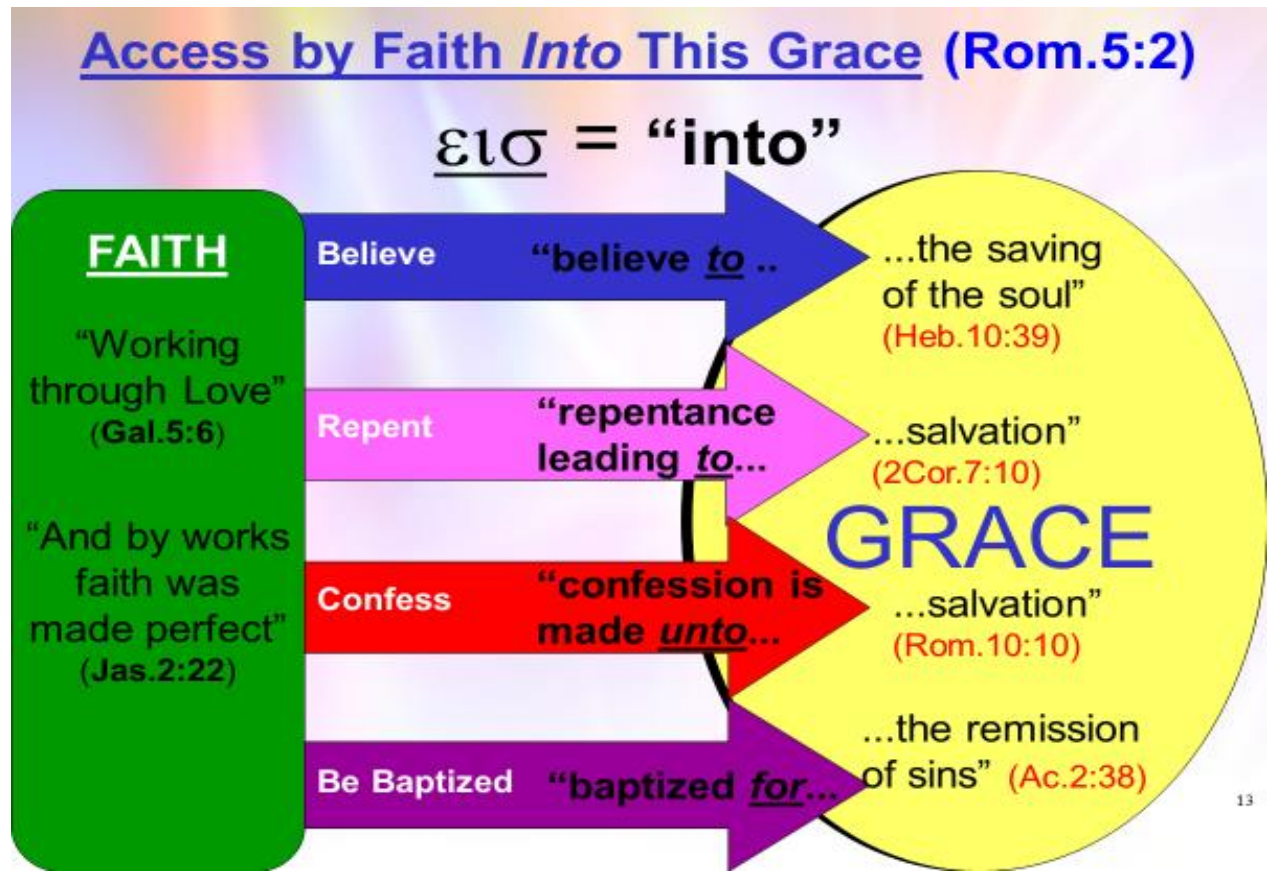
10

## By Grace You Have Been Saved (Eph.2:8)



## You Have Been Saved Through Faith (Eph.2:8)





# GOD'S GRACE: BOOK\CHAPTER\VERSE

## BOOK OF ROMANS INTRODUCTION:

“Romans is a rare thing in religion: an explanation. Scripture is full of stories, visions, parables, proverbs, genealogies, poetry, prophecy, and even history. These are priceless. But beyond an occasional gloss, interpreted dream, or decoded parable, we’re never given anything like what Paul offers. We’re never given ten thousand words of raw explanation. With extraordinary insight and psychological precision, Paul lays bare the underlying logic of the gospel. He explains what sin is and why we choose it, the relationship between sin and grace, how sin abuses God’s law and subverts religion, how Jesus saves us from death and sin, and what a new life in Christ looks like, both individually and collectively. The view is staggering.

It’s my argument that the deep logic of Romans comes into sharp focus around a single premise: Paul’s claim that grace is not God’s backup plan. Paul never quite puts it like this, but he implies it at every turn.

To make sense of Romans, we have to surrender a very natural assumption. We have to stop pretending that the world revolves around us. We have to let God be the center of the universe.

We have to stop looking at God's grace from the perspective of our sin and, instead, let sin appear in light of grace. And this grace is everywhere. God's work of creation is a grace. His work of sustaining that created world is a grace. His willingness to shape us in his image and let us make our own way is a grace. His gift of the law is a grace. His Son is a grace. And his willingness to stand by us, regardless of our weakness or wanderings, is a grace.

This, though, is what sin can't abide. Sin wants to be the star of the show. From the perspective of sin, everything is about sin. As Paul describes it, sin is an active suppression of God's already obvious glory. It's a rejection of his already offered grace. Sin likes to think that it came first and that grace, then, is God's stopgap response. Sin acts as if God's original plan was for us to bootstrap ourselves into holiness by way of the law and then, when this didn't quite pan out, God offered his grace—but only the bare minimum—to make good the difference and boost us into righteousness.

**This is exactly backwards. Grace is not God's backup plan. Jesus is not plan B. God's boundless grace comes first & sin is what follows. Grace isn't God's response to sin.**

**Sin is our embarrassed, improvised, rebellious rejection of God's original grace. On Paul's telling, sin isn't just a name for our occasional, local lapses. Paul doesn't talk about sins, plural. Rather, sin names a whole way of being in the world. It's a name for the underlying sickness that links our local mistakes and defies our conscious choices. Sin abuses God's gifts and subverts them to its own end. It takes God's law, severs it from grace, and repurposes it as a wedge. Sin doesn't oppose religion, it hijacks it. It coopts religion itself as a way of alienating us from God.**

**Sin recasts the law as a measure of our ability to get by without God's grace. It sees the law as an occasion for us to judge others and, so, excuse ourselves. More, sin seizes the law as a chance to enflame our cravings. Because desire loves a vacuum—because we naturally want what we don't have—sin seizes the law's prohibitions as an opportunity to incite more sin.**



**When the law shows up as a deprivation rather than a gift, it works crosswise to its intended purpose. It provokes what it was meant to forbid. And then, divided against ourselves, we feel powerless to change. We feel dead.**

**By raising Jesus from the dead, God demonstrates his unwavering fidelity to life and breaks the chains that bind us. God's commitment to making things right is unconditional. He hasn't held anything back, not even his Son. All the grace that sin tried to conceal and suppress by hijacking God's law is once again on full display in the resurrected Jesus. The love that sin tried to dam flows unimpeded in the body of Christ. Jesus returns us to life by revealing the truth about the law. He reveals that the law is itself a grace and that only grace can fulfill it. This new life in Christ crosses all the old boundary lines. God's grace is offered freely to both insiders and outsiders. Anyone willing to meet God's promised grace with faith and trust of their own will find guilt, fear, and anger washed away. Without waiting for us to make the first move, God's grace is already working to gather and seal the whole human family as joint-heirs with Christ."**

**Miller, Adam S.; Grace Is Not God's Backup Plan: An Urgent Paraphrase of Paul's Letter to the Romans (pp. 1-5). Kindle Edition.**

## Saved By Grace

By Kevin Cauley

Categories: [Sermon Outlines](#), [Textual Sermon Outlines](#)

Scripture ref: [Ephesians 2:8-10](#)

**SUBJECT:** Salvation

**TITLE:** Saved by Grace

**PROPOSITION:** In this lesson we will discuss [Ephesians 2:8-10](#). We will note: 1) The source of salvation. 2) The substance of salvation. 3) The selflessness of salvation. 4) The state of salvation.

**OBJECTIVES:** Each person should be able to discuss the meaning of [Ephesians 2:8-10](#) with supporting scriptures.

**AIM:** To educate the brethren regarding [Ephesians 2:8-10](#) so that they can discuss it with others.

### INTRODUCTION:

1. Read: [Ephesians 2:8-10](#) *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."*
2. About the Text:
  - 1) Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus.
  - 2) His purpose in writing is to show the glory of God through the church ([Ephesians 3:21](#) *"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."*
  - 3) He emphasizes that those who are in the church have been brought out of bondage to sin. ([Eph. 2:1-3](#)).

- 4) God did this by 1) having mercy upon us, 2) loving us, and 3) making us alive with Christ. (Eph. 2:4, 5).
  - 5) Paul then says regarding this process, "By grace ye are saved."
  - 6) This leads us into our text.
3. Ref. to S, T, P, O, and A.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

#### **I. THE SOURCE OF SALVATION. "FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED... IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD."**

1. It originated from the Father. John 3:16
2. It came through the Christ. Romans 5:15-18
3. It was revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. Titus 2:11, 12. *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;"*

#### **II. THE SUBSTANCE OF SALVATION. "...THROUGH FAITH..."**

1. Hebrews 11:1 - substance. Faith is where the rubber meets the road.
2. It has been said that grace is God's part of salvation, and that faith is man's part of salvation.
3. Faith picks up where the Holy Spirit left off in revealing the word. Rom. 10:17
4. Faith must then TRUST God's word. Romans 10:14. *"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"*

5. Faith must then ACT upon God's word. **Romans 10:13** *"For whosoever calls upon the name..."; Acts 22:16.*
6. When faith and action are combined, we will not have a dead faith. **James 2:26** *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."*

**III. THE SELFLESSNESS OF SALVATION. "AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES... NOT OF WORKS THAT NO MAN SHOULD GLORY."**

1. The way is not in ourselves. **Jeremiah 10:23** *"O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."*
2. When we submit to God's grace through faith, we cannot say that we accomplished this ourselves.
3. It is not of our own accomplishment/invention. **1 Corinthians 1:27-29**
4. It is not of our own righteousness.
  - 1) **Isaiah 64:6** *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."*
  - 2) **Romans 10:1-4.**
5. It is not of our own merit. **Luke 17:10** *"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."*
6. The glory, therefore, is all to God. **1 Corinthians 1:30, 31.**

**IV. THE STATE OF SALVATION. "FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS UNTO GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD HATH BEFORE ORDAINED THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM"**

1. We are the clay and he is the potter. **Jeremiah 18:6** *"O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel."*
2. We are the branches and he is the vine. **John 15:1ff** (read)
3. We are the vessel and he provides the contents. **2 Cor. 4:7** *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."*
4. God molds and shapes us through His word.
  - 1) **Matthew 4:4** says, *"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*
  - 2) **John 6:63** *"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."*
  - 3) **John 8:31, 32** *"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

**CONCLUSION:**

- 1) The source of salvation. - God's grace.
- 2) The substance of salvation. - Our faith.
- 3) The selflessness of salvation - not of our own merit.
- 4) The state of salvation - we are his workmanship.

## God's Marvelous Grace

By [Mike Riley](#)

Regarding God's marvelous grace, the apostle Paul declared in [Titus 2:11](#): "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." Grace is often defined as "unmerited favor" or a "free gift." It has more specific application to the gift of salvation which God gives to men. It can have a generic application to other areas, i.e., God's gift of making the sun to shine, the rain to fall, providing our food, etc. (cf. [Matthew 5:45](#)). Let us contemplate God's gift of salvation for a few moments. Any gift that is offered and received has four elements, and each of these is biblically important:

### 1) There Must Be A Gift

The gift in which we are interested is that of salvation. David wrote: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" ([Psalm 51:1](#)). Paul said, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men" ([Titus 2:11](#)). God's grace brings salvation, which is manifested in two ways:

**(a) Salvation from past sins** – Jesus stated: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" ([Mark 16:16](#)). In this statement, the Lord referred to salvation from one's past sins.

**(b) Salvation in Heaven or eternal life** – Peter wrote to Christians about "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" ([1 Peter 1:9](#)). Our salvation comes by means of the blood of Christ shed in His death on the cross, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" ([Hebrews 2:9](#); cf. [Romans 5:9-10](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [1 John 1:7](#)).

## **2) There Must Be A Giver**

If there is a gift, there must be a giver. “Grace” is the Bible term for that which God (the Giver) gave through Christ. God is the source of our salvation, and for this reason, “grace of God” is found twenty-four times in the New Testament. Paul exulted: “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” ([2 Corinthians 9:15](#)). There is no other source of salvation. Therefore, we cannot save ourselves (either by good works or by our moral behavior). We must have God’s grace to be saved.

## **3) There Must Be A Receiver**

A third necessary component of a gift that is accepted is a receiver. Mankind is the recipient of the marvelous grace of God. God has done for man what man could not do for himself. On his own, man could not find the right way ([Proverbs 14:12](#); [Isaiah 53:6](#); [Jeremiah 10:23](#)). A human being, when he reaches the time in his life where he can discern right and wrong ([Isaiah 7:15](#)), commits sin ([Romans 3:23](#); [Gal. 3:22](#)), and thus deserves death ([Romans 6:23](#); [James 1:15](#)). Man could not and cannot devise a way to save himself or earn his salvation, as Paul clearly states in [2 Timothy 1:9](#): “Who [God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” In [Ephesians 2:8-9](#), he also indicated that man cannot earn his salvation. Man must rely upon God and His grace to be saved: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

## **4) The Giver May Impose Conditions**

The giver may impose conditions relating to reception of the gift. This is not a necessity; the giver may give a gift without any conditions. To impose or not to impose conditions is entirely at the discretion of the giver. Whether or not the giver imposes conditions relating to his gift, it is no less a gift – and unmerited – in either case. God has placed conditions upon our reception of His “gift” of salvation.

God says that upon “hearing” His Word we must “believe” in Jesus as His Son ([John 8:24](#); [John 14:1](#); [Romans 10:17](#)). When we believe, we must, upon that belief, “repent” of our sins ([Luke 13:3](#); [Luke 24:46-47](#); [Acts 17:30](#)).

A faith not worth confessing is not worth possessing, thus we must “confess” our faith in Jesus as God’s Son ([Romans 10:10](#); [Acts 8:37](#)). Then we must be “baptized” (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of our sins ([Mark 16:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [Acts 22:16](#)). While baptism saves us from our past sins ([1 Peter 3:21](#)), we must, to be eternally saved in Heaven, live faithfully until death ([Matthew 10:22](#); [1 Corinthians 15:58](#)).

## **Conclusion**

God’s marvelous grace is available to all men everywhere ([Titus 2:11](#)); however, only those who meet the conditions which God has attached to this “gift” will receive this most important and precious of all gifts.



## Some Aspects Of God's Grace

By [Mike Riley](#)

Categories: [Church of Christ Bulletin Articles](#)

[Titus 2:11-14](#) states:

*"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live [soberly](#), righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."*

According to the above text:

**1) God's grace "has appeared to all men"** — Since God is no respecter of persons, salvation is offered to both Jew and Gentile ([Acts 10:34-35](#); [Romans 1:16](#); [Gal. 3:26-29](#)).

**2) God's grace "teaches" us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts"** — Our old sinful life must be rooted out and our selfish attachments to this world must be replaced by spiritual goals ([Colossians 3:1-2](#)). God does not "take away" our inclination to sin; but by His grace, he teaches us to deny the entrance of sin into our life ([Matthew 16:24](#); cf. [Psalm 119:11](#); [Romans 6:6-14](#); [Colossians 3:5-11](#)).

**3) We are to "live soberly, righteously, and godly"** — Our lifestyle should reflect the positive teaching of God's grace.

**4) We are to look for "that blessed hope"** — Our Lord, whose appearing signals the end of our sojourn here and our reception into the heavenly home ([Titus 2:13](#); cf. [John 14:1-6](#)). Hope (made possible by God's grace) is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast ([Hebrews 6:19](#)). It sustains us in time of trial.

**5) “Who gave Himself for us”** — The purchase price being the only price by which man could be justified in God’s sight ([Romans 5:6-10](#); [Ephesians 1:5-7](#)).

To what end did our Lord “redeem us from every lawless deed?”

**6) To “purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works”** — a peculiar people, a special kind of people, a people especially shaped and molded to be God’s own possession ([1 Peter 2:9](#); cf. [Deuteronomy 14:2](#); [1 Chronicles 17:22](#) ). God’s special people should be zealous of performing God-ordained good works, as God has every right to expect ([Ephesians 2:10](#)).

## Sermon on God's Grace | The Biblical Picture of Grace

By [Kevin Cauley](#)

Categories: [Sermon Outlines](#), [Topical Sermon Outlines](#)

**Sermon on God's Grace** - Kevin Cauley writes that the Biblical picture of God's grace shows us its 1) Definition, 2) Direction, 3) Duty, and 4) Determination.

**SUBJECT:** Salvation

**TITLE:** Grace

**PROPOSITION:** The Biblical picture of Grace shows us its 1) Definition, 2) Direction, 3) Duty, and 4) Determination.

**OBJECTIVES:** Everyone should be able to explain the meaning of grace and how that implies that we do not earn our salvation.

**AIM:** To encourage the brethren through the study of grace.

**INTRODUCTION:** [ Beginning of this sermon on God's grace. ]

1. Read: [Ephesians 2:8](#)
2. About the Text:
  - 1) All have at one time been alienated from God.
  - 2) It is through God's grace that it is possible for us to return to him.
3. Ref. to S, T, P, O, and A.

**DISCUSSION:** The Biblical picture of Grace shows us its...

### I. THE DEFINITION OF GRACE—IT IS UNMERITED FAVOR

1. [Ephesians 2:1ff](#)

2. Romans 5:12ff
3. 2 Corinthians 8:9

## II. THE DIRECTION OF GOD'S GRACE—IT COMES FROM GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

1. John 1:17
2. 1 Corinthians 1:4 "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;"
3. Ephesians 2:7 "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

## III. THE DUTY OF GRACE—TO MAKE SALVATION POSSIBLE

1. Acts 15:11 "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."
2. Romans 3:24 "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:"
3. Titus 2:11-12

## IV. THE DETERMINATION OF GRACE—OUR SALVATION IS NOT EARNED

1. Romans 4:4-5
2. Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"
3. Titus 3:3-7

**CONCLUSION:**In this sermon on God's grace..

1. Let us remember the..
  - 1) Definition of Grace.
  - 2) Direction of Grace
  - 3) Duty of Grace
  - 4) Determination of Grace

## Sermon on John 3:16 – God's Grace as Shown by John 3:16

By [Kevin Cauley](#)

Categories: [Sermon Outlines](#), [Textual Sermon Outlines](#)

Tags: [Sermons on John 3:16](#)

**Sermon on John 3:16.** A textual study of [John 3:16](#) noticing God's grace as it reveals itself through his motivation, method, message, and mission.

**SUBJECT:** Theology: Soteriology

**TITLE:** God's Grace as Shown by John 3:16

**PROPOSITION:** In this lesson we will do a textual study of [John 3:16](#) noticing God's grace as it reveals itself through his motivation, method, message, and mission.

**OBJECTIVES:** The hearer should be able to understand fully [John 3:16](#) and show how God's grace relates to man's obedience.

**AIM:** In this lesson I hope to communicate that [God's grace](#) is not devoid of our obedience and that grace is actually the entire scope of the [plan of salvation](#).

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. Read: [John 3:16](#)
2. About the Text:
  - 1) Nicodemus had come to Jesus by night.
  - 2) Jesus told Nicodemus what he had to do to be saved. "Except ye are born of the water and spirit..." 3:5
  - 3) There was a further question which Jesus answered in this way: "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" 3:12

- 4) Evidently, Nicodemus had some questions about heavenly things, but all that was on our Lord's mind was the plan for man's salvation.
  - 5) Jesus says, "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven. . ." (John 3:13-21).
  - 6) The focus of this passage is verse 16 which will be our study tonight.
3. Ref. to S, T, P, O, and A.

**DISCUSSION:** John 3:16 reveals to us in the plan of salvation God's...

**I. MOTIVATION-LOVE. (FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD) .**

1. Romans 5:8 "But God commendeth his love toward us..."
2. Romans 8:35-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ..."
3. 1 John 4:7-10 "Beloved, let us love one another..."
4. Ephesians 2:4-10 "But God, who is rich in mercy..."

**II. METHOD-HIS SON (THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON) .**

1. He is the Son of God "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him..." Matthew 1:20-23
2. He came to serve-"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:5-11)
3. He came to bring salvation through his death-Hebrews 9:11-15 "But Christ being come an high priest..."

**III. MESSAGE-BELIEVE (THAT WHOSOEVER WOULD BELIEVE ON HIM) .**

1. God wants us to have a life of faith-Hebrews 11:6 "For without faith..."

2. More than this he wants us to believe in his Son Jesus—[John 20:30-31](#) "Many other signs. . ."
3. [John 1:7-12](#) "The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light...:"
4. [John 4:42](#) "And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."
5. [John 8:24](#) " I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

#### **IV. MISSION—ETERNAL SALVATION FOR ALL (SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE).**

1. [John 10:27-28](#) "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."
2. [Matthew 25:46](#) "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."
3. [John 6:68-69](#) "Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."
4. [John 17:1-3](#) "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

## “His Grace Reaches Me”

By [Mike Riley](#)

Categories: [Church of Christ Bulletin Articles](#)

Paul once reminded Titus that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men ([Titus 2:11](#) – NKJV). Due to mankind’s deliberate act of transgression ([Genesis 3:1-6](#) – NKJV; [Romans 5:12-17](#) – NKJV; [1 John 3:4](#) – NKJV) he separated himself from the love and protection of God ([Isaiah 59:1-2](#) – NKJV; [Ephesians 2:1](#) – NKJV). Those folks who choose to break the commandments of the Lord, destroy the beautiful relationship they once enjoyed with the Creator.

However, God has so loved mankind as to make a way for him to return to His Creator ([Hosea 14:1-4](#) – NKJV; [John 3:16-17](#) – NKJV; [Romans 5:8](#) – NKJV). The New Testament writers utilized the word grace to describe God’s intense love for mankind – His crowning creation.

Grace is defined as God’s favor which mankind in and of himself does not deserve. However, God’s grace must be appropriated by man through **acts of faith** ([Romans 4:1-8](#) – NKJV; [Hebrews 11:8](#) – NKJV; [Hebrews 11:17-19](#) – NKJV; [James 2:21-24](#) – NKJV).

Titus was reminded that God’s grace had indeed appeared to all men in the form of the preaching of the gospel of Christ ([Titus 1:3](#) – NKJV; [Titus 1:11-14](#) – NKJV). Luke recorded Paul as saying that he testified to the gospel of the grace of God. ([Acts 20:24](#) – NKJV). Therefore we can know for sure that where the gospel has gone, so has the grace of God gone also. It is certainly true that the Grace of God has forever been manifested for all at Calvary, but the crucifixion will do no good to the one who has no faith in the crucified One ([John 8:24](#) – NKJV; [Acts 2:21](#) – NKJV; [Romans 10:17](#) – NKJV).

Yes, “His grace reaches me” — and not only me, but it reaches to all who will gladly receive His word and be obedient to it ([Acts 2:38-41](#) – NKJV; [Acts 10:34-43](#) – NKJV; [Acts 10:48](#) – NKJV; [Acts 11:14](#) – NKJV; [Hebrews 5:8-9](#) – NKJV).



The Grace of God is not like a sword, forcing men to be saved — rather, it's similar to a clear flowing fountain of pure, and refreshing water that earnestly bids all to come and drink freely ([Revelation 22:17](#) – NKJV)

*Deeper than the ocean and wider than the sea,  
Is the grace of the Savior for sinners like me;  
Sent from the Father, and it thrills my soul,  
Just to feel and to know,  
That His blood makes me whole.  
His grace reaches me,  
yes, His grace reaches me,  
And 'twill last thru eternity;  
Now I'm under His control  
and I'm happy in my soul,  
Just to know that His grace reaches me. —Whitney Gleason*

*The Spiritual Sword Vol. 17 #4*  
*Special Issue@Amazing Grace*

[Harmony of Romans 11:6 & James 2:24](#)

**“James emphasizes that a right standing with God depends on a faith that is obedient to the will of God. Grace is still involved, because for God to reveal His will to us is itself an expression of divine grace. We would again distort the truth an expression of divine grace.**

**We would again distort the truth if we suggested that salvation could be obtained in the absence of any human action. Salvation is not by faith alone!**

– Rusty Peterman

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**God's Grace: Mar's Hill Speech**

“Paul made it clear that of one blood the Creator made us all (Acts 17:26). Each one shall give account unto God for the deeds done in his own body (Romans 14: 12). The grace of the Lord has appeared unto all (Titus 2: 11) and, therefore, the universal nature of Judgment Day is chronicled in this graphic speech.” – John Ramsey

## Transactional to Transcendent Religion: Internalized Belief & Behavioral System

Areopagites' Assumptions	Acts 17	Apostle's Assumptions
<i>Being Religious Is Enough</i>	: 22	This Is Totally Insufficient
<i>God Unknowable By Men</i>	: 23	Our God Is Very Knowable
<i>God In Temples Domestic</i>	: 24	God Created The Cosmos
<i>Worship Offering Transact</i>	: 25	God Gives & Needs Not
<i>Peoples Made Differently</i>	: 26	All Men Made From Adam
<i>When Where We Live Fate</i>	: 26	Space Place Is By Design
<i>God Afar &amp; Man Reaches</i>	: 27	Seekers Finding God Near
<i>God Afar &amp; Man Reaches</i>	: 28	He Sustains His Creation
<i>Humans Childs Of Nature</i>	: 29	We God's Own Offspring
<i>God Seen Carved In Stone</i>	: 29	God's Image Viewed In Us
<i>Ignorance Excuse For Sin</i>	: 30	God Not Now Winking At
<i>Deity Is Morally Indifferent</i>	: 31	He Involves Himself Deep

