

Grace in the Old Testament



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Many people have the erroneous notion that the OT is all law and the NT is all grace. Some liberals even maintain that the God of the OT is harsh and vindictive but the God of the NT is tender and forgiving. Some people think that OT believers were saved by keeping the law and NT believers are saved by grace through faith! Of course these misapprehensions are not totally made up God never changes; in both Testaments people are saved by grace through faith. "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness" is way back in the first book of the Bible (Gen 15:6). It is an important verse and it is quoted three times in the NT.

“Grace Triumphs over the Law!” says the radio preacher. The apostle Paul is the champion of Grace over the law of God many claim. Some people don’t even want to hear why some Christians keep the law of God. Instead they feel sorry for you. They believe you are deceived by the “salvation by works” churches and leaders, calling them “cults.” Well can their claims be substantiated? Well, no! Often times, if not most of the time they won’t even let you explain your position about why you keep the law of God. They want to stay in their ignorance, and afraid they might learn something that they will never learn from their pastor who went to Bible College. (We are all very impressed!).

What is Grace?

The topics of grace always come up in a conversation about the law vs. grace debate. Just what is grace? Is it contrary to the law of God? Or *is it* the law of God!

The word “grace” in Hebrew is “*khane*” and it is described as “From H2603; graciousness that is subjectively (kindness favor) or objectively (beauty): - favour grace (-ious) pleasant precious [well-] favoured.” (Strong’s # 2580).

The Greek equivalent is “*charis*” (Strong’s #5485). This word basically means the same thing when it comes to God’s attitude towards us, “(1) on the part of the bestower, the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, loving-kindness, goodwill generally, e.g., Acts 7:10; especially with reference to the Divine favor or ‘grace,’ e.g., Acts 14:26” (“Grace” Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). How does one know that we are in God’s favor? Does the Bible give us the answer?

God’s Law is Grace

It’s interesting that no one has really comprehended the fact that grace is in the Old Testament. God says, “For I *am* the LORD, I change not;” (Malachi 3:6). God does not change. If we are saved by grace in the New Testament, then we are saved by grace in the Old Testament.

The Bible speaks of “by grace are ye saved *through* faith” (Ephesians 2:8). What is faith?

James says, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, **and I will shew thee my faith by my works.**

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: *the devils also believe, and tremble.*

“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that ***faith without works is dead?***” (James 2:17-20). Faith is belief in God, yes, but we show our faith in God BY OUR WORKS! As it says the devils believe and tremble, why? They don’t obey; they do not do the works of God. What is that work?

James writes, “*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only*, deceiving your own selves.

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and *not a doer*, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

“For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

“But whoso looketh into the ***perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein***, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a ***doer of the work***, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”(James 1:22-25).

This is the work of God to keep the perfect law of liberty, the law of God! Paul said the same thing, “(For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the *doers of the law shall be justified.*” (Rom 2:13). Jesus said, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, *but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life*, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

“Jesus answered and said unto them, *This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*”(John 6:27-29). Jesus said we are to labor, or work for everlasting life. That work is to believe on Jesus, Faith in Christ, this is the first commandment in the law of God in Exodus the 20th chapter. (Read our booklet the saving works of God for details).

In Deuteronomy 32 God is speaking about how eventually Israel would forsake his law, and he says, “And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end *shall be*: for they *are* a very froward generation, *children in whom is no faith.*” (v.20). They had no faith because they were sinning in God’s sight. Sin is breaking the law of God (1 John 3:4).

Jesus speaking of the Law said condemning the Pharisees, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, ***and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith***: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” One of “weightier matters of the law” is FAITH! There are many aspects of the Law, and keeping it is faith.

Paul said quoting Habakkuk, “For as many as are of the ***works of the law*** are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that ***continueth not*** in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

“But that no man is justified by the [works of the] law in the sight of God, *it is evident*: for, *The just shall live by faith.*

“And the [works of the] law is not of faith: but, *The man that doeth them shall live in them.*” (Gal 3:10-12). We are not justified by the “works” of the law which is our ways, man’s ways, not God’s which is sin as Isaiah says, “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.” (64:6). Paul says that those who do the works of the law are cursed because the “continue not” in all the things “written in the book of the law to do them.” Notice the works of the law is in *contrast with the law of God*, so the works of the law cannot be God’s law but the

law of sin. Sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). This is what the “works of the law” are, sin. This is not faith. Paul wrote, “...for whatsoever *is not of faith is sin.*” (Rom 14:23).

But the just “live” by faith. And the man “*that doeth them shall live in them*” Paul said, “(For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the *doers of the law shall be justified.*” (Rom 2:13). Those who keep the Law of God are the just!

Now in the King James the quote in Galatians is not the right rendering. It should read “he shall live [because of] them” (Strong’s # 1722). Of course this is quoting from Leviticus 18:4-5. The K&D Commentary says, “*The man who does them* (the ordinances of Jehovah) *shall live* (gain true life) *through them*” (emphasis theirs). Gill & Barnes commentaries write, “It is evident moreover that the Jews understood Moses here as referring to more than temporal blessings. The ancient Targum of Onkelos renders the passage in Leviticus thus: ‘The man who does these things shall live in them to eternal life.’ So the Arabic version is, ‘The retribution of him who works these things is that he shall live an eternal life.’” (Emphasis added).

But notice also what Paul says here, “And the [works of the] law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.” Our ways are not faith! Israel when they received the law Paul said, “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, *not being mixed with faith* in them that heard *it.*” (Heb 4:2). They did not obey God but built a golden calf. This led to death. Their ways, not God’s. “BUT, The man that doeth them” that is God’s law that is faith, and because of his faith which is God’s law he will “live” because of them, because the “just shall live BY Faith.”! That is keeping the law of God.

Now Habakkuk says, “just shall live *by his* faith.” (2:4). the rendering is “by” faith. But as we have seen he that “doeth them shall live [because of] them” One translation in keeping with the theme renders it, “But the righteous person will live *because of* his faithfulness.” (GWT). The context is life, eternal life, and because of his faith he will receive it.

This rendering is correct in keeping with the context because the word “by” is in the Greek “ek, ex” and it means, “A primary preposition denoting *origin (the point whence motion or action proceeds), from, out (of place, time or cause; literally or figuratively; direct or remote):* - after, among, X are, at betwixt (-yond), by (the means of), exceedingly, (+ abundantly above), for (-th), from (among, forth, up), + grudgingly, + heartily, X heavenly, X hereby, + very highly, in, . . . ly, (*because, by reason) of, off (from), on, out among (from, of), over, since, X thenceforth, through, X unto, X vehemently, with (-out).* Often used in composition, with the same general import; often of *completion.*” (Strong’s 15:37, emphasis added). “By whom also *we have access by faith into this grace* wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom 5:2). The Just shall live because of his faith, which is God’s law!

So Faith is KEEPING THE LAW OF GOD! It’s through faith we receive God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8).

Do we find this same concept in the Old Testament?

David writes, “Be gracious to me THROUGH YOUR LAW” (Psalm 119:29 NIV).

Solomon says, “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction.

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

“***For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.***” (Proverbs 1:7-9).

Notice the Levitical benediction, “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

“Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,

“The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:

“***The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:***

“The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

“And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.” (Num 6:22-27).

When the Lord’s face shines on us, this means he is “gracious” unto us. David uses this phrase applying it to salvation: “Turn us again, O God, and cause *thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*”(Psalm 80:3, 7, 19). Basically what David is saying is, by grace are we saved through faith!

How does God’s law show us that we are under his favor or grace?

First the Commandments show us the way to life. God says, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:” (Deut 30:19). Not just physical life but eternal life. Paul quoted that the just shall live by faith, and that he that does them “*shall live in them.*” Romans 10:5 makes it plain, “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.” Clearly the law says you can obtain eternal life by keeping it. Again quoting Gill & Barnes commentaries, “It is evident moreover that the Jews understood Moses here as referring to more than temporal blessings. The ancient Targum of Onkelos renders the passage in Leviticus thus: ‘The man who does these things shall live in them to eternal life.’ So the Arabic version is, ‘The retribution of him who works these things is that he shall live an eternal life.’” (Emphasis added). Now in the king James this is not the right rendering. It should read “he shall live [because of] them” (Strong’s # 1722). Of course this is quoting from Leviticus 18:4-5. The K&D Commentary says, “*The man who does them* (the ordinances of Jehovah) *shall live* (gain true life) *through them*” (emphasis theirs).

Secondly we do the things that please God, and have a right relationship with him. “***But without faith it is impossible to please him:*** for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Without faith we cannot please God. How do we please God by faith which is keeping his law. Notice what Isaiah says, “For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that ***keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant;***

“Even unto them ***will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.***”

(Isaiah 56:4-5). Keeping the law of God which is faith pleases God and he will give us eternal life, so says your bible!

Third the law tells us how we receive the forgiveness of our sins. That through blood atonement our sins are cleansed. Leviticus 17 says, “For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: ***for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.***”(v.11). This has not changed. Jesus is the blood atonement for our sins. It is still by his sacrifice that, “...the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin... And he is the propitiation [Gk. “Atonement” Strong’s #2434] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world” (1 John 1:7; 2:2). The sacrificial law has not changed. The only difference now is, Jesus is the sacrifice and not the blood of bullocks and lambs. This is called in the book of Hebrews the “time of reformation” where the more perfect sacrifice for sins is introduced which is Jesus, but the law itself is still in effect.

Fourth, God says that the law is our “wisdom.” “Keep therefore and do *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.”(Deut 4:6). The law of God shows us the way to peace between men and women, between countries as well. It shows us the way how to deal with crime, and live in a civilized society. It tells us how to run our economy, military, and how to govern our countries. When the law is kept we will be bless in all things, health, economy, family business etc... To be an example to other nations so they will says, “Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.”

God’s Law show mercy as Jesus said in Matthew 23:23. “And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.” (Deut 5:10)

“All the paths of the LORD *are* mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.” (Psalm 25:10).

The LORD *is* longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*. (Num 14:18). Mercy is granted to those who are repentant and want to change their lives. “With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: *for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*

“Let favour [grace] be shewed to the wicked, ***yet will he not learn righteousness***: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD.” (Isaiah 26:9-10). But also notice as David said his ways *are mercy*. Once one stops sinning and begin to keep God’s ways, the ways of God will heal you in your mind and body, and also you receive the assurance of eternal life! “Now faith is the substance [Gk. “assurance” Strong’s #5287] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1). “*The man who does them* (the ordinances of Jehovah) *shall live* (gain true life) *through them*” That’s a promise from Almighty God! So when one repents he is granted mercy and receives assurance of eternal life, his ways are truly merciful. “And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: ***for I am the LORD that healeth thee.***” (Ex 15:26).

Noah found Grace

In the days of Noah, a time when men were exceedingly wicked on the earth, the Bible says, “But Noah found **grace** in the eyes of the LORD.” (Gen 6:8). The Bible says Noah “found” grace. He was searching and he found it. How? By repenting and obeying the commandments of God!

“But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find *him*, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” (Deut 4:29).

“Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, **keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God**: that ye may possess this good land, and leave *it* for an inheritance for your children after you for ever.” (1 Chronicles 28:8)

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, **and seek my face**, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

“And commanded Judah to *seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment*” (2 Chronicles 14:4).

“And they *entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers* with all their heart and with all their soul;” (2 Chronicles 15:12). To “seek” or search is to seek the will of God, which is his law, and there you will find the grace of God, the way of life, as Noah found, and when he was saved he became a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5), which is of course the law of God (Psalm 119:172). He was a preacher of forgiveness, mercy and grace!

Grace the heart of the Law

The Ten Commandments is the way God wants us to live and have a relationship with him. God expresses his very character in the Ten Commandments. He says, “for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” (Ex 20:5, 6). This statement is continually repeated throughout the Old Testament revealing the grace of God. When Moses saw God and rejoiced over his mercy and grace said, “And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful and gracious**, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, “Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.”(Ex 34:6-7). This is the very character of God. He is gracious and merciful. The very law of God is his very nature, the divine nature God wants us to have. As Paul said, “...grace reign **through righteousness** unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 5:21). God himself said in the Old Testament, “for I *am* gracious” (Ex 22:27; 33:19).

Grace upon Grace

The Apostle John in writing his Gospel reveals that grace was given in the times of Moses and Jesus. “And of his fulness have all we received, **and grace for grace**.” (John 1:16-17).

“For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” (John 1:16-17). Does this mean that in the days of Moses, there was no Grace? Absolutely Not! As we examined in the Old Testament grace is one of the very characteristics of God engrained in the Old Testament law. Truth was also revealed in God’s law as well (Ex 34:6). David said, “Thy righteousness *is* an everlasting righteousness, and thy law *is* the truth.” (Psalm 119:142). As Jesus said, “thy word is truth” (John 17:17). The truth of God’s salvation was known in the Old Testament, David said, “But as for me, my prayer *is* unto thee, O LORD, *in* an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, *in the truth of thy salvation*” (Psalm 69:13). So what does John mean when he wrote, “For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”?

Lutheran scholar Göran Larsson [1, pp. 260-262 *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions*] believes that one key to understanding John 1:17 can be found in Exodus 34:6-7, one of the most important and often-quoted passages in the Hebrew Scriptures. When Moses climbed Mt. Sinai with the new set of tablets, God met him with the following



Many Christians feel this is the correct interpretation of the Old and the New Testaments. But the Bible reveals that the Law of God in the Old and New Testaments are one and the Same!

Declaration of His essential attributes of character: “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and **gracious God**, slow to anger, **abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands**, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6-7, NIV). Notice the wonderful traits of God’s character, “compassionate and gracious”, “slow to anger”, and “abounding in love and faithfulness.”

The phrase “maintaining love to thousands” is also significant, since it is a promise of future grace. The verb translated “maintaining” has the sense of something being stored up for the future, and “thousands” can refer “to coming generations or to a great multitude in general” [Larsson, 1 p. 261].

With these verses in mind, let's look again at John 1. Verse 14 of that chapter describes the Word, Jesus Christ, as "full of grace and truth", a possible reference to the phrase "abounding in love and faithfulness" from Exodus 34:6. John goes on to say in verse 16 that "from the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another." (NIV) In other words, God's grace just keeps on coming. As Ex. 34:7 pictures, God stores up His love and pours it out again to generation after generation.

In context, we can see that John 1:17 is elaborating on the fact that God gives "one blessing after another." It mentions the law as one great gift of God's grace, then Jesus Christ as a second, even greater gift. John 1:17, so, is not a statement of "law versus grace." Instead, *it rejoices in the "grace upon grace" that God has showered on His people for millennia and promises to continue to pour out upon us forever.*

But why does John phrase it, "For the *law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*" The problem was not with John, but with the King James Translators. The view that an antithesis is expressed in John 1:17 seems to be endorsed by the King James Version of the Bible, which places the word "but" between the two clauses of this verse even though *no such word appears in the original Greek text* [Larsson 1, p. 261]. Notice that "but" is italicized in the King James. This means it was added in by the translators. This was used to clear up some verses that seemed difficult to understand.

Is the word "but" implied in John 1:17? Is law being contrasted unfavorably with grace in this verse? From a theological standpoint, *an affirmative answer to these questions is problematic.* Since God's nature and character are *unchanging*, it seems logical that He is working out a single, unified plan and purpose in the world. Why, then, would there be a sharp dichotomy between two important aspects of that plan and purpose?

An opposition between law and grace, or Moses and Jesus also, *does not stand up to an examination of the biblical text, either of the Hebrew Scriptures or of the first chapter of John's gospel as we have seen in the Old Testament.* The NIV correctly translates John vv16-17 as, "From the fullness of his grace we have all received **one blessing after another** "For the law [one blessing] was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ [another blessing]" The true meaning again, in context, God is continuing to pour out his grace, "grace upon grace" from one generation to the next, God gave the law through Moses. In that Law he gave Moses we have *grace and truth*. Jesus is the "prophet...Like unto me [Moses]" (Deut 18:15). Like Moses, God sent Jesus to Israel with grace and truth. One blessing after another God sends to his people Israel and the world.

The God of Grace has never changed. He has given mankind his grace since the beginning. It is part of his very nature. He told Malachi, "For I *am* the LORD, I change not;" (3:6)