Law and Grace

What is grace?

Grace is often defined as unmerited favor or mercy, and that has a lot of merit to it. The word grace comes from the Greek word χάριτί (charis) which means grace, favor, gratitude, or gift. It is something you receive without doing anything to earn it.

What the Bible Says about Grace

This Greek word is used 156 times in the New Testament, most often translated as grace, but also appears as favor, gift, thank, favor, and even pleasure. However, this is not a word that is exclusive to the New Testament.

The word grace also appears in the Old Testament. In the Hebrew, the word is חן (chen), which means grace, favor, pleasant, or precious. In Psalm 45:2, the author is telling how favored the people of Korah are in the sight of God when he writes, "**You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.**" The writer is explaining that God is speaking grace upon this nation, He is speaking favor.

In Psalm 86:6, David is pleading with God to hear him. He prays, "**Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace.**" Clearly, the word is used to demonstrate the mercy and favor of God.

This is true in the New Testament as well. One of the best examples is found in Ephesians 2:8-9, where Paul is inspired to write, "**8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**"

Here, Paul makes it clear that one's salvation is a free gift from God. A person has not done anything to earn salvation. This is a complete gift and is favor shown on the part of God.

The book of John begins with several declarations about Jesus, including that He came to provide grace. John 1:14 states that Jesus came from the father, "**full of grace and truth.**" Two verses later, it tells us that John the Baptist is speaking about Jesus when he states, "**For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace**."

Do you feel that you have received God's grace?

How has God demonstrated this to you?

Grace Is Mercy and Power

It is clear that grace has a lot to do with the mercy and favor of God. However, it is actually a lot more than this.

The Greek word charis is where we get the "charismatic" movement. This movement believes that God has bestowed incredible abilities, gifts, upon people that enables them

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to heal, speak prophecy, speak in tongues, provide incredible wisdom, and much more. It is a movement founded on the idea that the charis of God is a powerful gift as well.

While some have debated this point, one thing that is clear is that the grace of God continues long after a person has accepted the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross. While we are always in need of God's mercy, His favor, we also need His guidance and power.

One such example that supports this belief is found in Acts 4:33. Here it reads, "**And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all**." This section of verses (Acts 4:32-37) is discussing how the followers of Jesus shared everything with one another. It also explains how the apostles were able to speak boldly about the resurrection of Jesus, and that they had great grace upon them.

This does not allude to the idea of spiritual gifts (healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues), but an ability to powerfully live out the life for Jesus. Grace was upon them so that they were able to take care of all of those who were needy, acting in a fair and loving way to assist all those who came to them. They were also able to speak boldly through the grace of God.

As you grow closer in your walk with Jesus, can you feel God's grace leading you to help others?

What are some ways that you can show God's grace to others?

The Law of God

The Law of God contains commandments that God gave to His people. Most think of this as the Ten Commandments, but that is just a summary of the Law. In fact, there are over 600 commandments that God has given to His people.

The commandments are rooted in one primary principle – holiness. We serve a holy God who acts righteously in all instances. How we know this is that God is the one who follows the Law to perfection. Jesus made this perfectly clear during his time on earth. In Matthew 5:17, He explained that he did not come to "abolish the Law or the Prophets," but instead came to "fulfill" the Law.

Do you believe that Christians are required follow the commandments of God?

Jesus Emphasized the Importance of the Law

For hundreds of years, there has been an idea taught that the Law no longer has a place within the life of the Christian. That Christians are under grace, meaning that the Law has no impact on the life of the believer any longer.

This belief seems to be supported in verses like Romans 6:14, which declares, "**For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under**

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grace." Paul reiterates this in Galatians 5:18, where he writes, "**But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**"

These and similar verses seem to give the idea that the follower of Jesus is no longer bound to follow the law. However, that belief is far from the truth.

It's the Condition Your Heart, Not Your Legalism

One of the interesting aspects of Jesus ministry is that He taught the Law in a profoundly different way than many of the religious leaders of the day. Following His assertion that He came to fulfill and not abolish the Law, Jesus then explained the Law in a much different way than the Pharisees and other religious leaders would have.

He started by addressing anger and hate. Many of the "righteous" of the day would have believed they were righteous because they did not murder someone (Matthew 5:21-26). Therefore, they were right before God. However, Jesus explained that if they wished that terrible things would happen to someone, that they were just as guilty as if they had actually murdered the person. In other words, if they desired to see bad things happen, then they were not righteous at all.

Jesus provided the same type of teaching related to lust. In Matthew 5:27-30, Jesus explained that not having sexual relations with someone does not mean that a man is not guilty of adultery. If a man is lusting over the wife of another man, he is just as guilty as if he actually would have committed adultery. His heart is far from God, so he is guilty of violating the commandment.

Would you agree that a person who violates the Law in his or her heart is just as guilty of committing the offense?

Why do you think that Jesus set the standard so high?

These may be hard teachings, but they are based on the standard of God – holiness. One who takes an oath, swearing to God that he will do something, is guilty of violating the Law if he does not do it. A man who hates his enemies is guilty of violating the Law. One who ignores the needy is guilty of violating the Law. His or her heart is not close to God.

Putting Them All Together

Jesus makes it clear that the believer is to follow the Law in his or her heart. Paul seems to make it clear that a person is no longer bound by the Law at all. Why the seeming contradiction?

This goes back to a principal that we began these classes with – if there is a seeming contradiction in the Bible, it does not mean the Bible is contradicting itself. It means that our understanding is somehow flawed.

This has been the problem with those pastors, theologians, and other religious leaders who have taught that the Law has no place in the life of the believer. In fact, it has every place.

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Let's understand something about the Law right now. It is perfect. David writes in Psalm 19:7, "**The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;**" There is absolutely nothing wrong with the Law at all. It is perfect in every way, and something that all Christians should believe. Therefore, it is the standard of holiness that we should embrace for our own lives.

So, let's try to eliminate the misconceptions. Let's start in Galatians 5:16-18.

> **16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**

Paul begins by stating that a person who is walking in the Spirit will no longer follow the desires of his or her flesh. Do you remember what the works of the flesh, the sinful nature are?

A person walking completely in the ways of God, following His grace, will no longer have impurity, sensuality, sorcery, fits of anger, rivalries, divisions, envy, drunkenness, and the like. He or she will be free from the accusations of the Law, because that person is not living a life that is in violation of the Law. That person is led by the Spirit, meaning that the Law is not accusing them of doing anything wrong. Instead, that person is showing the fruit of the Spirit. Do you remember what the fruit is?

So, this then begs the question – are you walking completely in the Spirit, or is your sinful nature still present in your life?

If you are honest with yourself, then you have to admit that you are still violating the Law of God. Therefore, you are still under the Law. The Law is still accusing you of doing things that are wrong. When you add the standard set by Jesus into the picture, it is clear that our hearts are far from the standard of holiness that God wants for us.

Now, let's return to Romans 6, starting in verse 12:

> **12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.**

Paul is not telling us that the Law has no place in the life of the believer. Instead, he is encouraging believers to no longer let their sinful nature, their own passions and desires, lead them.

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He is encouraging them to recognize that Jesus paid their debt on the cross so that they were free from the ultimate punishment – death. Believers are brought to life, and should be walking in righteousness and holiness. In this way, Paul is encouraging them to no longer let sin have control and ownership of them, but to instead live in the righteousness of God. When a person does this, then the Law has no accusation against him or her. Instead, that person is living in the grace of God.

So, What Do I Do?

Now that we have properly come to understand the role of grace and the Law, it is time to put these two things together. The Law is there not as a means God is using to hold sinful acts against the believer. Instead, it is the standard that God wants us to follow. In 1 Peter 1:16, God says, "you shall be holy, for I am holy." We serve a holy God. He wants us to be holy as well. Therefore, He is calling upon us to live a life of holiness, following the law in complete perfection.

Let's make this perfectly clear. The Law was given to us for two reasons. First, to show us the standard God has for us and, second, to reveal how we have fallen short. We will not reach God's standard on our own. The religious leaders in Jesus' day believed that they were saved by following the Law, but we can never do so. We need Jesus. Jesus died to pay the debt for our sins, so we are now completely forgiven. It was His grace that removed our sins, not anything we did our own.

There are two additional points that need to be made clear. First, God understands that you are going to fall short. Therefore, the grace of God is there to be merciful and show favor to you when you fail.

Second, God knows you cannot do this on your own. Therefore, He has given you His grace to be able to have the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to resist your sinful nature and embrace the fruit of the Spirit. God has given you His grace so that you can be forgiven and He has given you His grace so you can live a powerful life for God. In essence, His grace has given you the freedom to be forgiven for your violations of the Law, and His grace is given to you to give you the ability to follow the Law.

How do you see the grace of God in your life?

How can the Law help you to walk more fully in the grace of God?

How would you like to see the grace of God impacting your life more?

Your Memory Verse: Ephesians 2:8-9 – **8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

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Bible Passages for the Week:

Monday – Romans 6:14

Tuesday – Ephesians 2:8-9

Wednesday – Titus 2:11-14

Thursday – Hebrews 12:14-16

Friday – Galatians 5:16-24

Saturday – Pick a passage from Scripture that teaches you about the grace of God.

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