

ARE WE UNDER LAW OR GRACE?

INTRODUCTION

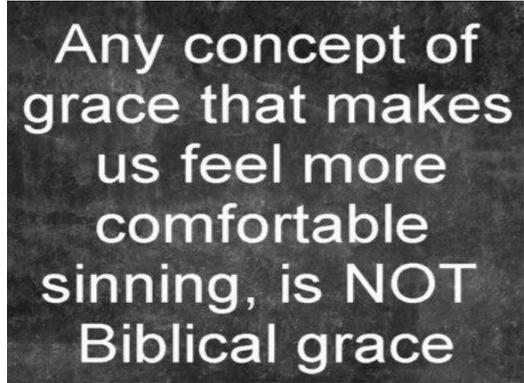
1. In the course of a study regarding what one must do to be saved, a young man stated, “You make a serious fundamental, pharisaic mistake - you believe that one is saved by works of the law. There is a fundamental truth that will change your outlook if you can accept it, and it is this: we are not under law, but grace. John said, ‘For the **law was given through Moses**, but **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**’ (John 1:17).”
 - a. This statement reflects a serious misunderstanding of the nature of both law and grace; it misrepresents the nature of the *religious system* to which men are accountable.
 - b. Sadly, many walk under the banner of “grace” and argue that they are free from the constraints of divine law, and at liberty to forge their own route along the religious terrain.
2. It is no surprise that many today are ready to repudiate the idea that man is responsible to divine law. Outlaws always avoid and shun law! The reality is, this irresponsible suggestion - that people 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.

REBUTTAL

1. The terms “law” and “grace” are employed to designate the predominate systems of divine revelation; viz., the two covenants. The first covenant was delivered to the Jewish nation through Moses at Sinai - the Law of Moses. The second covenant was delivered to all nations through Jesus Christ, and was ratified by His death (Matthew 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 (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The writer of the book of Hebrews referred to these laws as the “first” and the “second” (Hebrews 8:7), or the “old” and the “new” (Hebrews 8:13).
2. John designates the two covenants respectively as “law” and “grace” (John 1:17).
 - a. It is essential to understand the explanation for these appellations. It has to do with *the prevailing themes characteristic of these systems*.
 - 1) The function of the Mosaic “law” was: (i) To demonstrate that the violation of divine law separates the perpetrator from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), (ii) To declare that written law is needed to define sin (Romans 7:7), and (iii) To show, by recorded precedent, that divine justice requires that a penalty be paid for law-breaking (Romans 3:26; 1 Corinthians 10:5ff).
 - 2) The design of the New Covenant is to stress the redemptive mission of Christ as the only remedy for the sin problem (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 15:3). The plan of salvation is the result of Heaven’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), not human merit. If one had to choose a word that summarises the scheme of redemption, then what richer term is there than “grace”?!
 - b. It is entirely reasonable, therefore, that these two systems should be set forth in a contrasted fashion, such as “law” and “grace.”
3. To suggest that the Old Testament is devoid of grace and the New Testament is devoid of law is absurd.
 - a. Is the Old Testament devoid of grace? Anyone, with even a cursory knowledge of Scripture, knows that there was an abundant measure of grace under the Old Testament: Noah found “grace” in the eyes of the Lord long before the Mosaic Law was ever given (Genesis 6:8), but it was not the kind of grace that disavows obedience (Genesis 6:22; cp. Hebrews 11:7). In fact, there are many Old Testament passages that stress God’s grace toward those who responded to His will (cp. Exodus 33:13; Deuteronomy 7:12; Jeremiah 31:3).

b. Is the New Testament devoid of law? Consider these points:

1) Were it the case that man is not under law in this age, then no such thing as sin would exist, for sin is a transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). As Paul says, "For where there is no law there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). But it is evident that all men, even Christians, do sin (1 John 1:8-2:2), which necessarily implies that there is a divine law to which men are amenable. Indeed, any concept of grace that makes us feel more comfortable sinning, is not Biblical grace.



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2) The Old Testament prophets, in previewing the coming of the Christian age, spoke of the current dispensation as one where the law of God would be obligatory. Isaiah spoke of the days of the new covenant, when God's **law** would go forth from Zion (Isaiah 2:2-4). Likewise, when Jeremiah spoke of the "new covenant", he made it the equivalent of God's "law," which would take up residence in man's heart. "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

3) Jesus Christ is repeatedly depicted as a "king" and this clearly sets forth the concept 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 Matthew 2:2; 28:18; Luke 19:14,27; Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9-10; Hebrews 5:9; Revelation 1:5; 19:16).

4) 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" (Romans 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" (Moses Lard).

4. Elsewhere, Paul acknowledged that he was "under law to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21). Additionally, to the Galatians he gives this admonition: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). And if the inspired James is not referring to the present order of things, when he alluded to the "perfect law" (James 1:25), of what was he speaking?

Conclusion

A careful consideration of the foregoing facts enables us 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 divine law.