



# “Where is the Grace?”

First taught at the East Albertville  
church of Christ on Aug. 30, 2023.

# **Titus 2:11-15, NRSV**

**For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.**

# “You’re a Legalist”

- When speaking with our denominational friends and neighbors, if the subject of God requiring complete obedience ever comes up, you will likely hear the question “**Where is the grace?**” or the rebuttal “**That’s not true because we are under grace now.**”
- We are called “**legalists,**” which is actually a compliment if you think about it.
  - “**Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven**” (Matt. 5:19).
  - “**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone**” (Matt. 23:23).

# “You’re a Legalist”

- We are called “**legalists**,” which is actually a compliment if you think about it.
  - **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (Matt. 28:19-20).**
  - **“If you love Me, keep My commandments . . . He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me” (John 14:15, 21, 23-24).**

# “You’re a Legalist”

- We are called “**legalists**,” which is actually a compliment if you think about it.
  - **“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth . . . Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him” (1 John 3:18, 24a).**
  - **“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).**

**Jesus and His apostles were “legalists”  
by the modern definition of the word!**

# “You Are Not Under Law But Under Grace”

- Now, despite these passages, many still believe that being under Christ’s law of grace and liberty means we are not expected to live in complete adherence with His law.
- They misconstrue passages such as Rom. 6:14b to contend that anyone who teaches Christ requires complete obedience every second of every day are simply “legalists.”
  - Rom. 6:14b reads, **“you are not under law but under grace.”**
- In addition to the fact that the “law” referenced in this verse is speaking about the Law of Moses, these folks also conveniently overlook the first half of this verse which says, **“Sin shall not have dominion over you.”**
  - In other words, we **“must not”** allow sin to ever be our **“master”** (GNT).
- Remember, **“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other”** (Matt. 6:24).

# “You Are Not Under Law But Under Grace”

- *For ye are not under the law, but under grace: he adds this as a reason of that he had asserted and promised: you are not under a legal, but gospel dispensation; so some expound the words; grace is often put for the gospel: or, you are not under the old but the new covenant (Matthew Poole’s Commentary).*
- *There is strength in the covenant of grace for us . . . Shall any take occasion from this encouraging doctrine to allow themselves in the practice of any sin? Far be such abominable thoughts, so contrary to the perfections of God, and the design of his gospel, so opposed to being under grace. What can be a stronger motive against sin than the love of Christ? Shall we sin against so much goodness, and such love? (Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary).*

# “You Are Not Under Law But Under Grace”

- *but under grace; under the covenant of grace, and in the enjoyment of the blessings of it; under the Gospel, and the dispensation of it, which leads and teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; under and in the possession of the grace of justification and pardon, which strongly influence to righteousness and holiness; and under regenerating and sanctifying grace as a reigning governing principle in the soul. The apostle's view in this is, to affect the saints with their present privilege, and to engage them in a cheerful conflict with sin, and to stir up in them an abhorrence of living in it (Gill's Exposition).*

**This is exactly what Titus 2:11-15 also teaches!**



# Misconceptions about Grace

- To be clear, God's grace has certainly appeared to all men (Titus 2:11), and not just an elect few as many falsely teach.
- Jesus died for the entire world.
  - **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”** (John 3:16).
  - **“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”** (1 John 2:2).
- Likewise, we are saved by grace. There is nothing man could possibly do to save himself; only God's grace makes salvation possible.
  - **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”** (Eph. 2:8-9).

# Misconceptions about Grace

- Christians are rightfully quick to explain to our denominational friends that we must continually obey God to receive the gift of His grace.
  - **“But why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?”** (Luke 6:46).
  - **“Having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”** (Heb. 5:9).
- We also will quickly explain to our once saved, always saved friends how Gal. 5:4 shows clearly that committing sin causes a Christian to fall from grace.
  - Yet, how easily it appears some Christians forget these truths when it comes to realizing grace ceases promptly at every sin.

# Grace Does Not Abound Where Sin Abounds

- There are those who prop up the false doctrine of “continual cleansing” and automatic forgiveness for sins of ignorance without repentance that stems from an obvious misunderstanding of how God’s grace works.
- Let us be very clear: Grace does not abound where sin abounds. I believe this is the very reason why Paul rhetorically asks: **“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!”** (Rom. 6:15).
- Sin always separates.
  - **“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear”** (Isa. 59:1-2).

# Grace Does Not Abound Where Sin Abounds

- If we do not believe that sin always separates, then we necessarily imply that Christ did not actually need to die. Yet, He died to deliver us from the world and the worldliness therein.
  - **“Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father”** (Gal. 1:3-4, ASV).
- And remember, all sins - whether intentional or committed in ignorance - bear this consequence: **“The wages of sin is death”** (Rom. 6:23a).
  - The passage does not say “the wages of intentional sins” result in death. It just says **“the wages of sin is death,”** meaning all sin bears the consequence of death.

# Grace Does Not Abound Where Sin Abounds

- While intentional sins carry with them additional consequences (see Heb. 10:26-27), sins committed in ignorance still carry the same eternal consequence of intentional sins - the loss of God's grace and impending eternal death, unless we repent, both for unbelievers AND believers.
  - **“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).**
    - There is no distinction in this passage about only unbelievers needing to repent of their sins. Christians MUST repent when they sin too.

**Repentance is a full-time job for Christians; at least, it should be, shouldn't it?**

# Misconceptions about Repentance

- Repentance is often defined as "a change of heart that leads to a change of action."
  - **"For the sadness that is used by God brings a change of heart that leads to salvation—and there is no regret in that! But sadness that is merely human causes death"** (2 Cor. 7:10, GNT).
- Repentance is not a one-off or temporary experience.
  - Even though Jesus expects us to **"sin no more"** (John 5:14; John 8:11), we all do sin from time to time (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10).
  - Since we all do sin, that means we are never going to stop repenting if we want to please God.
  - Believers should continually repent of our sins as we continually turn from the things that separate us from God.

# Repentance is Always Required

- Since Christ's sacrifice is the "free gift of God" (Rom. 6:24), many think forgiveness comes freely before or even without repentance and confession of sin. Yet, that was not the case for Simon (who was a Christian who sinned) in Acts 8.
- Simon accepted Peter's rebuke (v.24) - implying he confessed his sins, in keeping with 1 John 1:9 - and Peter commanded him to repent (v.22), so we can see these conditions are necessary for Christians to receive forgiveness after they sin, thus returning them to God's grace.
- Most Christians agree with this conclusion, but will then make the exception for sins of ignorance, completely ignoring passages such as Luke 12:46-48; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Matt. 15:14; Prov. 14:12, all of which teach clearly that sins committed in ignorance lead to death just like Peter's intentional sin of covetousness.

# Sins of Ignorance Will Still Be Punished

**“The master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:46-48).**

- This passage teaches there will be degrees of punishment.
- This passage also teaches that sins of ignorance will be punished.
  - They seemingly won’t be punished as badly as intentional sins, but sins of ignorance still bear a great and eternal punishment.



# Sins of Ignorance Will Still Be Punished

**“With all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (Thess. 2:10-12).**

- People who believe lies typically do not do so intentionally; they do so in ignorance. Yet, they will still be condemned.

**“Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (Matt. 15:14).**

- Both the blind leader and blind follower receive the same punishment – falling into the ditch, showing that even a person who accepts false doctrine in ignorance will still be punished.

# Sins of Ignorance Will Still Be Punished

“There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12).

- Just because we do something that seems right and pleasing to God does not mean we will not receive the end result if we ignorantly sin in trying to serve Him – we will receive still death.
- When a Christian makes the exception that sins of ignorance are automatically forgiven when God has not made such an exception, what the person is really doing is saying what most denominational believers believe and teach: “**Sincerity and grace trumps truth and obedience.**”

# A Clear Conscience Does Not Always Equal Being Clear with God

- In 1 Cor. 4:4, Paul concluded, “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me” (RSV).
- We can see that even if we are diligent in trying to live righteously but are lacking even in just one point, even unintentionally, we are still guilty of sin (and the whole law - James 2:10) and stand condemned before God.
- Obviously, this is one of those “hard” truths. We may have a clear conscience before God and not be aware that we have sins charged against us through ignorance.

**What is a Christian to do?**

# What Can We Do?

- “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).
- “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7).
- “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (John 7:17, ESV).
- “Without faith it is impossible to please Him . . . He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).
- “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting” (James 1:5-6a).

# Conclusion – “Where is the Grace?”

- As we have seen clearly from the scriptures, God’s grace ceases when sin begins, and this is always the case.
- We must be busy everyday doing the Lord’s will to “**keep**” ourselves “**in the love of God**” (Jude 21), because we know that faith without complete obedience will not save us. Faith without obedience will just be a “**dead**” faith (James 2:14-26).
- To ensure our faith does not become dead, let us all strive to understand the will of God to the best of our capabilities through fervent prayer and studying of His word.
- When we fall short of His divine standard, let us confess our sins and repent, and let us never fall into the trap of believing that ignorance and God’s grace will ever excuse us from the wrath of God against sin.