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Law and Grace: WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

BY RICHARD JORDAN

The exact nature of grace should be crystal clear to every child of God. Unfortunately this is all too often simply not the case. Since the law principle is the antithesis of grace, this is a good place to start understanding what grace is all about.

Legalism is the enemy of grace. The reason many try to put themselves and others under such a performance system is a failure to understand the basic nature and difference between law and grace.

AN IMPORTANT FOUNDATION

The first thing to remember is that the believer today is “*not under law but under grace.*” This is because, as Romans 7:4-6 declares:

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become DEAD TO THE LAW BY THE BODY OF CHRIST; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

“For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

“BUT NOW WE ARE DELIVERED FROM THE LAW, that being dead wherein we were held; THAT WE SHOULD SERVE IN NEWNESS OF SPIRIT, AND NOT IN THE OLDNESS OF THE LETTER.”

You get the idea that the law is *not* the program under which we operate today! Rather we are to “*serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.*” This has not always been so.

In *Time Past* God dealt with the nation Israel under the Law. Paul says in Romans 2:17, 18,

“Behold, thou art called a Jew, and RESTETH IN THE LAW, AND MAKEST THY BOAST OF GOD,

“AND KNOWEST HIS WILL, AND APPROVEST THE THINGS THAT ARE MORE EXCELLENT, BEING INSTRUCTED OUT OF THE LAW.”

Israel’s crowning glory, the very centerpiece of her separation from the nations, was the Law. She alone among the nations of the earth had the form of knowledge and truth found in the law; she alone could approve more excellent things and understand what God wanted men to do (cf. Rom. 2:14; 3:1,2, Psa. 147:19,20).

But Now God has a new system of operation in place—a new way for believers to walk: *grace*. In the dispensation of grace we are not under the control of the law but rather have been placed under the administration of grace. This is a basic, foundational issue: In *Time Past* God had a system in which believers were to live: *law*. *But Now* God has a different system in which believers are to live: *grace*.

If this basic dispensational distinction is not recognized at the beginning only confusion and frustration will follow. The Christian life will not operate on the basis of ignorance. Neither will it function simply on the basis of the way you and I want to do things. Our lives will bear the “fruits of righteousness” *only* as we walk in line with what God is doing.

THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE

The two systems, law and grace, are perfectly good, workable and legitimate systems. They are simply *different*—so different that they are totally incompatible with one another. Let’s consider their fundamental difference for a moment:

The law is a *performance system*—a system where receipt of blessing is *conditional*, being based on proper adherence to a prescribed set of standards and expectations. It is the “*if...then*” principle articulated to Israel in Exodus 19:5,

"Now therefore, IF YE WILL OBEY my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, THEN YE SHALL BE a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine."

The proposition was clear enough. *If* they lived up to the divinely established mandates, *then* they would receive the promised blessings. *If*, however, they failed to give the required exact obedience, *then* a curse and judgment would follow. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-29 set forth this principle in great detail.

Under the law principle, blessings are received conditioned upon performance—and failure to live up to the expected performance resulted in judgment. A classic example in the life of Israel is found in II Chronicles 7:14.

"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."

Notice the clearly defined "*If...then*" proposition. To have God's blessings on their land (which is clearly detailed in passages like Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28), Israel simply had to perform up to God's standards and requirements. Failure to do so resulted in not only the loss of blessing but punishment for failure (also detailed in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-29).¹

This is the way law works, whether in regard to you and God, or you and your spouse, yourself or others. Remember: this is not the way we are to conduct ourselves as believers today. In the dispensation of grace our walk, whether in relation to God, those around us or ourselves, is to be *under grace*. When our approach to life is that of keeping rules, we place the burden on ourselves—and that is only to assure failure.

The law is a *performance system*—but what about *grace*? How does grace operate? Let's begin with Romans 3:24:

"BEING JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS GRACE THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS."

Grace is a *free gift*—it is being given as a free, undeserved gift. It is "*the free gift*" principle of

Romans 5:15. Law does not give anyone a gift; it *requires* performance to be given to it. Grace, on the other hand, gives the gift to us—"*the gift by grace*" (Rom. 5:15).

It's a gift—and it's ours! What we would have to work for to gain under the law, God Himself bestows on us as a *free gift by His Grace*.

"...the judgment was by one to condemnation, but THE FREE GIFT is of many offences unto justification" (Rom. 5:16).

"...THE GIFT OF GOD is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Grace is the system of operating whereby in Christ—because of His finished, all sufficient work at Calvary—God can *freely give us all things*.

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS?" (Rom. 8:32).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath BLESSED US WITH ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST" (Eph. 1:3).

By God's grace the instant we rely exclusively upon Christ and His finished work at Calvary for our salvation, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit "*into Christ*" (I Cor. 12:13, Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27) and made "*complete in Him*" (Col. 2:10).

God's grace bestows upon us as a free gift an absolutely perfect and complete standing in Christ Jesus—it's a gift and we receive the whole package at the start!

The law is a *performance system*—a system of *conditional* blessings. Grace is a *free-gift system*—a system of *unconditional* blessing.

Under the law principle, blessings are received (and curses avoided) based on *proper adherence* to a prescribed set of standards and expectations. Under grace, blessings are *fully given as a free gift*.

It is little wonder, then, that Romans 11:6 so clearly states the impossibility of these two systems co-existing:

"And IF BY GRACE, THEN IS IT NO MORE OF WORKS: OTHERWISE GRACE IS NO MORE GRACE. BUT IF IT BE OF WORKS, THEN IS IT NO MORE GRACE: OTHERWISE WORK IS NO MORE WORK."

1. Although II Chron. 7:14 is often used as a supposed remedy for social ill in our day, remember: This is *not* a description of how God deals with people or nations in the dispensation of grace. Thus trying to obey this verse today will not make any difference to God.

THE FRUIT

At this point someone usually will begin to object: “If by grace we have this wonderful position in Christ and have already received all these spiritual blessings and already stand perfect and complete in the merits of God’s Son and nothing else—what about good works?”

It is amazing how *self* refuses to be left out of the picture! In fact, all of *religion* is designed to insert *us*—our efforts and our merit—into the picture.

It is noteworthy that in all of history God has given only one religion—and He gave it to the nation Israel. If we are careful to understand *and believe* what He says about the fruit of that religion—the Law—we will soon understand why grace is the only answer to the question of doing good works.

While Deuteronomy 4:1-8 make it abundantly clear the blessing and special privilege it was for the nation Israel to know God’s law, there was a flip side to this great asset—one we must never forget. Galatians 3:10 tells us:

“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.”

What good does it do to know what needs to be done if we cannot do it? In this case the *blessing* becomes a *curse*. Why? Because we are *unable* “to do them.”

The curse comes in the doing—because we cannot “do.” To live under the law is to live under a system where you are always doomed to *fail*. Not because the law is inadequate—but because *you* are.

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:19,20).

Because we are by nature sinners, “*the law worketh wrath*” (Rom. 4:15). Thus to look to the law principle to produce good works is only to produce failure. The Law clearly demonstrated the depravity of man and our impotence to do anything about it. “*The strength of sin is the law*,” Paul declares, because the power of sin is never broken by the law. As long as sin is in our heart it will manifest itself and

the law will be there to condemn us. The problem with the law system is that we are sinners, we fail to “do them”—we are *guilty*.

In Romans 3:21 Paul draws the contrast and declares that the righteousness of God is now revealed in a new way:

“BUT NOT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WITHOUT THE LAW IS MANIFESTED....”

God’s righteousness is now available *without the works of the law*! How so?

“Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God:

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

“To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:22-26).

God’s righteousness is now available *simply by believing in Jesus Christ*. We do not go to the law to get it but rather we go in faith to Jesus Christ to receive from Him the free gift of the perfect righteousness of God Himself—we are “*made the righteousness of God in Him*” (II Cor. 5:21).

While the performance-based-acceptance system of the law produces only failure and death, the gift-based-acceptance system that is grace bestows life and blessing. Now we are free to “*serve in newness of spirit*.”

You see, *grace* is not *against* good works—it simply does not bless on the basis of good works. We get the blessings because God gave them to us as a special favor, a free gift delightfully given in His Son. And now, the good works the law demanded, grace produces: We “*are become DEAD TO THE LAW*” that we “*should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, THAT WE SHOULD BRING FORTH FRUIT UNTO GOD*” (Rom. 7:4).

The key difference between good works under the law and under grace is the *motivating source* behind them. Under law, good works are required in order to *gain* blessing and *avoid* judgment. Under grace the blessing is freely given and the judgment

fully borne by Christ at Calvary—all the very moment we believe.

Good works are thus the natural *fruit* of the right standing we already have in Christ—they are simply our recognition of who God has *already* made us in Christ and what He has already accomplished.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Under grace it is God’s love for us so wonderfully demonstrated in the Cross of Christ that *constrains* us to live unto Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. We pray that this basic understanding of the difference between law and grace will make Colossians 1:5-6 a reality in us all:

“For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

“Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and BRINGETH FORTH FRUIT, AS IT DOTHS ALSO IN YOU, SINCE THE DAY YE HEARD OF IT, AND KNEW THE GRACE OF GOD IN TRUTH.”

The Glory of Grace

It is the truth of “*Christ in you the hope of glory*” that empowers the believer’s walk. To be “*dead to sin*” provides needed freedom from sin’s dominion; to be “*alive unto God*” provides the capacity to use this freedom to bring forth “*the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God*” (Phil. 1:11).

Galatians 4:1-7 demonstrates that a basic difference between a child and an adult is the issue of *freedom*. What a child is *required* and forced to do, an adult does *voluntarily*. What a child does in *fear*, an adult does in *freedom*.

Freedom is an awesome thing. Although it can be and too often is misused, when it is used for its intended purpose, our freedom in Christ is our most valuable spiritual asset. There are two aspects to freedom: freedom *from* and freedom *for*.

By God’s grace we have been freed *from* sin—from both its condemnation and its control. Free from guilt and shame. Free from the downward impulses and urges we couldn’t stop when in bondage to sin. Free from the tyranny of the expectations, opinions and demands of others. But this is not all—not by far.

God’s grace has also made us free *for* service. We are free to obey, free to love, free to forgive others as well as ourselves, free to serve and glorify Christ, free to live as adult members of the family of God.

When we come to appreciate the freedom of our Sonship, we recognize that we are free to voluntarily do that which formerly we did in fear. As adults we can voluntarily apply the wisdom of God to the details of our lives by making decisions based on the word of God.

God is surely glorified when believers bear the fruits of their righteous standing in Christ. These “fruits of righteousness are *by Jesus Christ*”—that is, they are mediated through Christ in us. There is literally an *outbreak of the righteous character of God on the stage of human history* through the lives of believers who bear these fruits.

This is, of course, the result of “*the word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (I Thess. 2:13).

We could never accomplish this by our own doings, no matter how well intentioned. Just as an apple tree bears apples *because* of the life that is in it, so the believer bears the fruits of righteousness *because* of the life of Christ living through us.

When Paul says, “*It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Phil. 2:13), he is referring to the Spirit of God working in the believer’s inner man through the word of God. Our service is not born out of an outward constraint or necessity, but rather is the result of the life of Christ in us working itself out through the members of our bodies as we voluntarily apply God’s wisdom to the details of our lives. Thus it is that “*the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body*” (II Cor. 4:10).

The glory of God’s grace to us in Christ goes far beyond simply what He has and is doing for us. It goes on into the manifestation of what He is doing for Himself through us, for we are simply “*His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*” (Eph. 2:10).

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The *real question*, of course, is not *how* but *why* give to the work of getting the unadulterated, undiluted message of grace out to others. But if you haven't come to grips with the answer to that question, you aren't ready to be a generous giver yet. Keep growing! Your time may come!

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

FORGOTTEN TRUTHS CONTINUES TO BEAR FRUIT and we want to welcome our new readers. Viewed over **DirectTV, DISH, AT&T U-Verse, Comcast, Charter, Time Warner** systems as well as a number of local broadcast stations, we are reaching a potential national audience of over 75 million households each week.

We've often referred to **Forgotten Truths** as “the little program that could.” With no large backers or financial reserves, it is genuinely a demonstration of what happens when the message of grace grips a person's heart—they want others to hear also! In your year-end giving, why not consider how you can help with this outreach “to make all men see.” Check it out at **www.ForgottenTruths.com**.

UP-COMING CONFERENCES proclaiming the message of grace abound. Some 2019 meetings where you can hear the Editor include:

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June 9-15:	Florida Grace Youth Camp
June 21-23:	Frankfort, KY
June 27-30:	Eva, TN (Family Camp)
July 20-25:	St. Charles, IL (Family Conference)
Aug. 9-11:	Calgary, Alberta

For details and updates, consult **GracelImpact.org**
or contact our office at **888.535.2300**

OVER THE PAST 35+ YEARS it has been the editor's great privilege to proclaim the rightly divided word across our nation, and even beyond its borders. One highlight of these meetings is meeting in person so many who have been transformed by the message of grace. Through it all we've also had an active ministry in jails and prisons—in fact, we have a host of inmates who are *GSB* students. Here is a slightly edited portion of a recent note from one:

“I'm 41 years old and I've spent the majority of my life in prison and in a gang. I held the rank of Major and was known as Hitler. They didn't name me that because of Adolf Hitler. I earned that name cause when I joined the gang I was in a hit squad known as the 6 Horsemen who carried out the hits for the gang. Hence the name Hit-ler! Now I'm just known as a man in the family of God and a brother in Christ!

“I was always seeking acceptance, embracement, love, respect and to make a name for myself. God has removed the darkened veil that was over my eyes and the wonderful light of Christ's love and grace have filled my life. I can't thank Him enough! I just want to tell ya'll thank you for your faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel to those of us who are locked-up and for providing the opportunity to attend your school. I plan to complete my studies about the time I'll be released and already have plans for ministry on the outside.”

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