



**“Where is the
Grace?”**

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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. The New Testament never condemns the strict keeping of the commandments of God. It commends 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).
 - The Pharisees were not condemned for keeping God’s commandments too well. They were condemned for keeping the small requirements while leaving off the big ones. Jesus told them that they should have kept both!

“You’re a Legalist”

- Those who love God will diligently and very strictly keep His commandments.
 - **“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).
 - **“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).
- Living faithfully requires one to be a legalist in the sense that Jesus demanded.

“You Are Not Under Law But Under Grace”

- 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 (among others) to contend that anyone who teaches Christ requires complete obedience are simply “legalists” (“**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 conveniently overlook the first half of this verse which says, “**Sin shall not have dominion over you.**” We “**must not**” allow sin to ever be our “**master**” (GNT). See also Matt. 6:24.
- Even the “minor” sins condemn (Rom. 1:28-32).
 - *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).*

Grace...

- 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).
- 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 a misunderstanding of how God’s grace works. God’s grace demands abstinence from sin (Tit. 2:11-15).
- And God’s Grace does not abound where sin abounds: **“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!”** (Rom. 6:15).
- Sinning just one time causes one to become a sinner (James 2:10; Acts 8:22).
 - One unrepented impure thought at the point of death will condemn just like one unrepented homosexual act at the point of death will condemn. If not, why not? Don’t be tempted to show partiality toward/against specific sins (James 2:9) !!!
- Sin always separates (Isa. 59:1-2).
- And remember, all sins bear this consequence (Rom. 6:23a) The passage does not say “the wages of intentional sins” result in death nor a “habitual walk in sin” results in death. It just says, **“the wages of sin is death,”** meaning all sin bears death. **NOTE: Rom. 6:23 is spoken to Christians (see v.1-4)!**

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.
- Some claim that as long as we have a heart that is set on doing the Lord's will, then if we sin God will cleanse us from those sins without repentance and confession. But if we sin, it always points back to there being a heart issue (James 1:14), whether the sin was intentional or unintentional.

Grace Does Not Abound Where Sin Abounds

- Rom. 8:1a (“**There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus**”) is often used to argue that God’s grace will overlook / cover unrepented sins.
 - However, Rom. 8:1a clearly is not teaching that there is no punishment for Christians caught up in sin because 1 Cor. 5:5, 13b teaches that an unfaithful Christian is, in fact, a condemned, unsaved, and evil person (see also Simon’s example in Acts 8). So, there can in fact be condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- Many also claim that Rom. 8:1b (“**who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit**”) teaches that only a walk in sin condemns rather than one or two missteps.
 - Such a position denies the fact that a walk is established by each and every step. If I am required to walk a straight line and I misstep and do not correct, I will continue walking out of line until I make correction. When we take one step off the straight path to Heaven, we will wind up missing Heaven unless we make correction! There can be no unrepented missteps (Rom. 13:14)!

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.
 - Maybe the reason so many Christians would rather choose a more comforting doctrine than one which demands repentance and confession of every sin is because we sin more than we care to admit and feel like we'd constantly be going to the front pew confessing sin or asking God a dozen times a day for forgiveness. But if we are at the front pew every week and praying every hour for forgiveness, so be it – let's continually repent and confess sin and be grateful for this avenue of forgiveness God has granted us!

A General or Specific Confession?

- Thayer defines the word “**confess**” in 1 John 1:9 as “to admit or declare oneself guilty of what one is accused of.” The word also means, “to declare openly.”
- Based on the definition of the word, it seems confession for forgiveness of sins requires more than a mere acknowledgement that one is a sinner, such as in Luke 18:13. Instead, a clear declaration of what one is guilty of must be acknowledged in order to receive forgiveness.
- When it comes to public confessions (James 5:16), discretion should be used (Eph. 5:12) so as not to potentially negatively affect the faith of others (Matt. 18:6-7), but specific confession should be made to God privately.

A Works-Based Salvation?

- Detractors will claim that emphasizing repentance and confession of every sin is a comfortless, works-based salvation. But is it?
 - If demanding Christians must repent in order for their sins to be removed (Luke 13:3) results in a works-based salvation, then we need to stop emphasizing repentance as a condition for salvation (Acts 2:38) since repentance is now apparently a work.
 - If demanding Christians must confess their sins in order for them to be removed (1 John 1:5-10) results in a works-based salvation, then we need to stop confessing the name of Christ as a condition for salvation (Matt. 10:32) since confession is now apparently a work.
- Neither repentance nor confession are meritorious works; they are simply conditions God requires in order for Christians to act upon the blood of Christ.
 - Non-Christians act upon the blood of Christ through repentance and baptism to have their sins removed (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), and Christians must act upon the blood of Christ through repentance and confession in order to have their sins removed (1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22). It should be VERY comforting to know God has laid out clearly the path to forgiveness!

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.

“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

“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.

“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.”**

What Can We Do?

- 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). 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 stand condemned before God. 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?**
 - “**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?”

- God’s grace ceases where sin begins, and this is always the case. His patience remains to draw us to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9), but His grace ceases.
- If we are guilty of unintentional sins / sins of ignorance, we must not be tempted to blame God for establishing conditions for how to have those sins removed, but simply submit to those conditions with gratitude knowing that He offers to cleanse us from our unrighteousness.
- 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 complete obedience will just be a “**dead**” faith (James 2:14-26).
- To ensure our faith does not become dead, let us all strive to continually seek out and 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 (Eph. 5:6).