

BIBLICAL GRACE

By

Neil H. Anderson

Introduction

Grace. Perhaps no other biblical subject has received more attention or had more words spoken and written about it than this one, pertaining to God's most attractive and intriguing attribute. Why, then, add to the mountain of written material already in existence on this subject? I think that it is because my several decades of observation of the church, in general, and individual Christians, in particular, have left me with the unsatisfying perception that much confusion exists concerning this most vital topic. Therefore, it is my desire to present a clear picture of Grace that includes the whole counsel of God from His Word. This paper will be an integrated view from both the Old and New Testaments.

Where to start is the immediate problem, so after much thought, I shall begin at the beginning with Genesis. Nonetheless, I will take the liberty of following the leadership of the Spirit of Grace wherever He directs me. Also, other topics are so connected to Grace that I will, as necessary, discuss these, as well. This is true, certainly, of Law and Grace which are intimately interconnected with each other by God's design.

God's Creation Reflects His Grace

All of God's creation before man was created was good in composition, scope, and function for the benefit of mankind. God created an environment on earth and a solar system that was perfectly favorable for humans as well as for animal and plant life. The sun, moon, and stars were for man's benefit and pleasure. The fact that animal life, including humans, uses oxygen and water and gives off carbon dioxide and water (as does fire), and plant life

must have carbon dioxide and water and gives off oxygen and water is not just fortuitous, but is by divine design so that all of God's creation concerning the earth may function correctly and man may live and move and have his being (Acts 17:24-28). The hydrologic cycle, whereby water alternates between earth and atmosphere, assures *available* water for plants and animals and helps maintain water levels in lakes and seas. The moon stirs the large seas and oceans by tidal action and regulates certain life functions in animal and plant life, as does the tilting of the earth on its axis causing length of day and seasonal changes. All of these things and much more are because of God's gracious love for us, and certainly **love is a component of Grace.**

God Showed Mercy to Cain

I believe that most would agree that *mercy* is a major part of God's grace, and mercy is one of the basic attributes of God. In Genesis 4, we have the account of Cain and Abel. Because of jealousy and hatred of Abel, Cain killed his brother. In dealing with Cain concerning his crime of murder, God not only showed Cain mercy (banishment instead of the death penalty), but before his sin, God counseled Cain regarding the sin that was about to destroy him (Gen.4:7b—"sin is at the door, and its desire is for you, *but you should rule over it.*" How could Cain possibly rule over sin? The obvious answer is to turn to God in repentance and faith, which Cain did not do. Rather, acting according to the flesh, Cain murdered his brother. His life could have been very different had he heeded God's advice, but he made his choice and lived with the consequences.

Men Began to Call on the Name of the Lord

Genesis 4:26 tells us an interesting fact. After Cain murdered Abel and went out from God, Seth was born to Adam and Eve and became the father of Enosh. After that, *men began to call on the*

Name of the Lord. This term is used sparsely in the Bible and means to call on God for mercy and salvation (Joel 2:32 and Rom.10:13 are two examples). At least some men were availing themselves of God's grace even in those very early days. Certainly, Abel was a righteous man, according to what Christ Jesus said in Matt.23:35—righteous meaning that he was lawful and was justified by God's grace through faith.

Perhaps at this point, we should comment on mankind's spiritual condition in the days of Adam after he fell from God's favor due to the sin of disobedience. We have already seen that Abel was said to be righteous and was therefore a man of faith, obeying God's commands in his worship of God; and later during the pre-flood era, Enoch and Noah are named as men of faith. Thus, God's grace was operative in those days, and some were choosing to call on the Lord for salvation. These facts assuredly do not support the doctrine of total depravity espoused by some Reform theologians, but do point to the free moral agency of man. Nevertheless, unholy, fallen man was in need of reconciliation to Holy God and was subject to physical death and was under a spiritual death sentence as long as he remained unreconciled (lost).

Even in his lost condition, man retained his image of God status after he sinned. Adam was created a spiritual, moral, rational, emotional being with freedom to choose good or evil. [Please notice what God said to Noah after the flood when He set the death penalty for murder (*Gen.9:5-6*—“*Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made him.*”). After the flood, God let Noah know that man could choose and was still responsible for his choices.] As with Adam and his descendants after the fall and before the flood, humans were still making moral and spiritual decisions, so with Noah and his descendants after the flood. Abel did so and chose to follow God and righteousness, but Cain made the wrong choice; and so it was with Noah's descendants and continues to be until this day.

Yet, repeatedly, God has challenged man to choose good over evil. In Cain's case, God warned Cain of the sin that waited (in Cain's mind and heart already) to destroy him, but God respected Cain's right to choose and did not interfere when Cain went out to kill Abel. **God put the choice of good and life or evil and death before Israel (Deut.30:15-20)**, yet most of them made the wrong choice—but not all. Moses, Caleb, and Joshua [and many more unnamed, I am sure] chose to believe and honor God.

Even though relatively few persons chose to avail themselves of God's grace before the Levitical atonement system was inaugurated, still the fact that some did seek and obey God means that grace was available even then. After the formal institution of the sacrificial system, many others who were faithful to God under that economy were redeemed after the cross of Christ. Christ's sacrifice was, indeed, for OT believers as well as NT believers (See Gal.4:4-5 and Heb.9:15.). Regarding the Israelites, there has always been a faithful remnant, as in the days of Elijah (1Kgs.19:18—"yet I have reserved 7000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him").

Grace in the Tower of Babel Experience

Genesis 11 gives us the interesting account of man's grand endeavor up to that time, the tower of Babel. God's action of confusing the people's language certainly displays His wisdom. In Acts 17:26-27, Paul made an astute analysis of that incident. ***"And He has made of one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us."*** How wise and loving is our God! By confusing the language (meaning giving each family tribe its own different language), God insured a

scattering of these tribes, and thus each would have an opportunity to seek Him, not being overridden by the corporate will of such a large community as it was before that happened. Thus, a single God-fearer in any tribe might influence others to seek to follow the true God. The picture of a person groping in the spiritual darkness of the world, hoping to find reconciliation and comfort in His Creator is a touching one, indeed. Paul said in Rom.1:19-20 that even as spiritually dark as that time seemed, yet there was light from God in the form of His creation which was able to reveal what might be known of God and His invisible attributes, and that men at that time were without excuse if they refused that light. Now, in God's good time, He will begins revealing and executing *His grand endeavor* for the sake of mankind.

ABRAMIC COVENANT: A GIANT STEP FOR GRACE

Beginning with Genesis 12:1-3, when God called Abram (Abraham), and continuing through the remainder of the OT, God facilitated and executed His plan to reach all mankind with His grace. He started by building a people for Himself whom He charged with the responsibility of living for Him and making His name known to all the nations of the world. This, of course, was Israel and they failed to live for God many times; they did not properly represent God much of the time; their disobedience in their sins of idolatry, immorality, and greed God punished them for, at times severely. However, even their stiff-necked sinful ways could not thwart God's program of reconciliation and redemption. God, being eternal, has no shortage of time to deal with humanity, and He is very patient and longsuffering.

By choosing to work through Israel, God focused mankind's attention on Himself, especially by His miraculous deeds in connection with Israel, and His plan progressed as He knew it would. God led, protected, and blessed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as He promised, and exposed the nations around them to His

representatives. The road was long and sometimes rough and circuitous, but God grew them into a nation and delivered them from slavery in Egypt when He called Moses to lead them.

The Giving of the Law and Its Purpose

The giving of the law, the Ten Commandments, is seen in Exod.19-20 and Deut.5. The law was given to furnish guidance in righteousness for the Israelites. They promised to obey God and do what He commanded them (Exod.24:3, 7). **God's desire was to be gracious to the people of Israel (Deut.5:29—“Oh that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep My commandments, that it might be well with them and their children forever!”)**. This is what God said to Moses right after giving him the Law and hearing the people's refusal to hear His voice. They asked Moses to hear God and then tell them what God said (See Heb.12:25-29.). Refusing to hear God is a sure recipe for spiritual disaster. No person or nation that does so will escape the judgment of God. God wanted a close relationship with the Israelites, to be their God and they would be His special people (Exod.19:5-6). In Deut.30:11-20 we find God's offer of grace to the Israelites. This was shortly before Moses' death. The offer was a choice between life and death (Deut.30:15-16, 19-20). They were challenged to step out in faith and to love and obey God. As we know from OT history, they did not choose to take that step of faith. See also Rom.9:30-33 for Paul's assessment of the Israelites' error. They did not seek after righteousness according to faith, but according to their self-righteous works of the law. They did not want the law to teach them to love God with all their heart (Deut.30: 9b-10) or to love their neighbor as themselves. Instead, the Israelites placed themselves under the letter of the Law (“All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.”—

Exod.24:4, 7). However, being a doer of the law requires faith and submission, neither of which the Israelites evidenced.

Was, then, the purpose of the law only to condemn transgressors? No. The primary purpose of God's perfect law was a gracious one. Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Tim.1:5) that "The purpose of the Commandment (law) is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from a sincere faith." The person who is of faith, walks according to the Spirit, and fulfills the righteous requirements of the law (Rom.2:26-29, 8:4) is living under grace and is not condemned by the law (Rom.8:1-3). Believers must be subject to the law out of love for God, fulfilling the law by the Rule of Love (Rom.13:8-10 & Matt.22:40, Gal.5:13b-14).

Paul further stated that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and insubordinate (those *not submitted* to the authority of God {1Tim.1:9ff}). This means, of course, those under the condemnation of the law and reserved for punishment demanded by the law—which is for *those who are disobedient, lack faith, and walk according to the flesh*. See also Gal.3:19—"It (the law) was added because of transgressions, until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made." To my mind, God did this out of love and mercy (in other words, His grace), so that persons of OT times could be saved and be able to obtain their inheritance in Christ, the Seed—See Gal.4:4-5 & Heb.9:15.

Those of faith in any age are obedient, fulfilling the law by love and willingly subject to it. A believer's justification does not depend directly upon his obedience to the law, but his sanctification is guided by it ("Study Psa.119:33-40, paying special attention to **verse 33**—"Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end." Let's be sure we understand what the Psalmist is saying here. *The way of your statutes* is not the letter of the law, but *the way is the purpose and intent of the Law*. What did Paul say in 1Tim.1:5 above?—"...the

purpose of the commandment is LOVE.” Those who are carnally minded are not subject to the law, indeed cannot be (Rom.8:7), meaning that the carnally minded person cannot possibly keep the Lord’s commandments. Unrepentant, unsubmitted persons are enemies of God and want no part of God’s law, because it condemns them for their sins. But those who love God, humbly submit to Him and keep His commandments (John 14:15, 21, & others).

Many NT believers are confused in their thoughts on the law. Under grace, a person is no longer condemned by the law for transgressions of the law (Rom.8:1-4). “For Christ is the *telos* [*‘end’ as in goal or fulfillment or achieved objective—not as in *termination*]* of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes.”(Rom.10:4). Christ becomes our righteousness when we are born of the Spirit. **Because Jesus bore our punishment for sin, taking the law’s condemnation for lawlessness (sins) off believers, we are no longer condemned, and that is how we are not under law but under grace (Rom.6:14).** Hence, *the punitive aspect of the law that was against us was nailed to the cross of Christ for those who trust and obey God (Col.2:13-14).* This is because sin that is repented of is forgiven in Christ and His righteousness is imputed to us who trust and obey Him. Even in the OT economy, the persons who walked by faith had the animal sacrificial (Levitical) system for temporary atonement for their inadvertent transgressions of the law. Before the Day of Atonement, the Israelites had to afflict their souls [consider and repent of transgressions]. I am sure that hypocrisy then was the same as now—counted as pretense before God. The Gentiles never were given the law, but when they kept the spirit of the law for conscience sake they were a law unto themselves and were looked upon by God as just men (Rom.2:13-16) *because they lived in the realm of God’s grace.* Nevertheless, Gentiles and Jews were (and are) lost apart from grace (Rom.2:12-13). When it comes to the administration of God’s grace, we need to keep in mind that

God is infinite and sovereign, and He is able to save all whose hearts are circumcised by Him and whose faith is committed to Him. We should not try to put God into a theological box, but should remember Isa.55:8-9—“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord.”

GOD’S OFFER OF GRACE: An OT and NT Comparison

We now come to the crux of Biblical Grace; and we need to consider some biblical facts that are essential for our understanding.

The Unity of Grace in the OT (Father) and the NT (Son)

- The same God saved OT and NT persons by grace through faith. OT Example: Abraham (Gen.6:15, Rom.4:1-12).
- Jesus, the Christ, died for all people from all of the ages (or dispensations) (1 Tim.2:5-6, Heb.10:10 & 14, 9:15).
- The same demands for loving God and obeying His commandments were made by the Father (OT—Deut.30:6, 10, 16, Jer.7:23) and the Son (NT—John 14:15, 21, 15:9-10).
- God’s grace (love, mercy, salvation) is eternal—Psalm 136, 1 John 4:16, John 3:16.
- God’s law is eternal (Psalm 119:89).
- Persons of faith, OT, NT, and present look to the cross of Christ (John 12:30-32).

- Keeping the law of God can be accomplished only by the grace of God operating in a person of faith by the Spirit of Grace (Hab.2:4, Rom.8:4&5).

- All those who walk by faith (past, present, and future) are the spiritual descendants of Abraham with whom God made His Covenant of Grace (Gen.12:3, 22:18), and through whom God worked, along with Moses and David to bring that covenant to fruition in the person of Jesus, the Christ.

- The law is an *adjunct* to grace and a *facilitator* of grace. Law and grace are not opposed or antithetical.
 - **Rom.7:7**—The law causes awareness of sin.

 - **Rom.7:12**—The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and good.

 - **Rom.7:13**—*Sin* is man’s problem, *not the law*.

 - **Rom.5:20, 7:13**—The law was given to make man acutely aware of sin’s offence to God. However, grace is much greater than sin. Mercy triumphs over judgment (**James 2:13b, Rom.5:20**).

 - **Gal.3:21**—The law is not against the promises of God (grace).

 - **John 14:15**—Those who love God (Jesus) will keep His commandments. Contrary to the distorted doctrine of the easy-believism crowd, Paul identifies these commandments in **Rom.13:9** as the Ten

Commandments and any other commandment the Lord has given (such as John 15:12). This is precisely the same command which God issued through Moses in **Deut.30:16** and other OT Scriptures, such as **Jer.7:23**.

OT and NT Offers of Grace: Deut.30:11-14 & Rom.10:6-13

The Apostle Paul used the Deut.30 Scripture as an evangelistic appeal in Romans 10. **The first thing he did was to affirm the subject of the Deuteronomy portion as “the righteousness of faith.”** (Rom.10:6a).

What Faith Does Not Say:

- “Who will ascend to heaven and bring it to us?—*Deut.30:12*
- “Who will go over the sea to bring it to us?—*Deut.30:13*
- “Who will go up to heaven to bring Christ down? (*Rom.10:6*)
- “Who will descend to sheol to bring Christ up? (*Rom.10:7*)

What Faith Does Say:

- ❖ “This commandment is not too mysterious—*Deut.30:11a*
- ❖ “It (faith) is not far away—*Deut.30:11b*
- ❖ “The word is very near you—*Deut.30:14 & Rom.10:8*
- ❖ “...in your mouth & in your heart--*Deut. 30:14 & Rom.10:8*
- ❖ “...that you may do it—*Deut.30:14; Rom.10:9* (**confess faith**)

DISCUSSION

One sees immediately from this comparison that the same God of the OT and NT was offering the same grace to the lost in the OT

and NT times. Someone will say “But the OT economy was law”, and I will say “It was law because the Israelites chose the letter rather than the Spirit” (Rom.9:30-33). Some individuals in OT times did walk in the way of God. Habakkuk 2:4 states very clearly that “*the just shall live by his faith.*” This has always been God’s standard for the person of faith—that he love the Lord with his whole heart, mind, and soul and walks according to God’s commandments, statutes, and judgments, being led by His Holy Spirit. David lived by faith and was led by God’s Spirit, for when he sinned and begged God for forgiveness he pled that God would not take His Holy Spirit from him (**Psa.51:11**).

Some may say that God’s ministry through His Holy Spirit in OT times was different than in believers in Christ since the cross, arguing that OT saints were not indwelt. This view is connected to Saul when he was disobedient, and God took His Spirit (guidance, leadership, protection, peace) from Saul. One should remember that Saul’s heart did not belong to God. Nevertheless, God empowered him to lead Israel and conquer her enemies. David’s heart was God’s and David depended upon the Holy Spirit just as a true believer does today (for wisdom, for instruction in righteousness, for comfort, for strength, for assurance of God’s love, for truth, for interpretation of God’s word, and for so much more). I am inclined to think that, if there was any limitation on the role of the Holy Spirit in the OT times, it was not one of scope, but rather to the number of persons personally controlled by Him.

It is abundantly clear from Scriptures that God’s great love for mankind was and is the chief motivating force for His grace. The Bible proves God’s gracious intent even in giving the law, which so often, out of ignorance, has been maligned. For the God-fearer/lover, the law is his trusted guide to righteousness and holiness, but to the unreconciled evil-doer, the law is a condemning judge. To the humble, submitted slave to Christ and His righteousness, fulfilling the righteous requirements of the law

by the rule of love (Gal.5:14, 6:2, Rom.13:8-10, Matt.22:36-40, James2:8) is a duty and a joyous privilege. To the worker of iniquity, the law is his hated enemy. To one who walks according to the Spirit, the law is a facilitator of grace and holiness. To the carnally-minded false professor, the law is in direct opposition to grace. The true child of God is led by God's law and by His Spirit of Grace "in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." The child of the world is led in the broad way that leads to destruction by the world/the flesh/the devil, "for to be carnally-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace." (Rom.8:6).

Since the God of the OT is the God of the NT, His requirements for a follower are the same in both OT and NT times. ***"I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and keep His commandments."*** (Deut.30:16a). Jesus said, ***"If you love Me, keep My commandments."*** (John 14:15); ***"...he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."*** (John 14:21b). **"The word that you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me."** (John 14:24b). Notice that it is the Father who set the requirements for holiness (being set apart for God's will and purposes) in both OT and NT divine administration.

In the last 100-150 years, there has been a tendency on the part of dispensationalist theologians to construct an artificial wall of separation between OT and NT grace (salvation). Yet the Scriptures do not support such a compartmentalization. Paul said, "There is one God who will justify the circumcised (Jews) by faith and the uncircumcised (Gentiles) through faith" (Rom.3:30). "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law." (Rom.3:31). **How does one establish the law through faith?** The answer to this question is essential to one's understanding of the unity of OT and NT grace, and will show the modern and post-modern dispensational idea

that law and grace are antithetical to be false. **The law must be written in the heart in order to establish it.**

As pointed out earlier in this paper, law and grace are not opposed, but rather, law is necessary for grace to abound (Rom.5:20-21, 7:7). Law is necessary for a standard of morality and righteousness. The law was teacher and guardian for OT persons of faith under the Levitical atonement system until Christ's sacrifice on the cross consummated the salvation of OT persons who died in faith (Gal.4:4-5, Heb.9:15). Even now, the law serves as the universal moral standard, and Christians are commanded to observe it, and we fulfill it by the rule of love. Therefore, the law is holy and just and good (Rom.7:12). Of course, saved persons are not condemned or judged by the law, because we are justified by faith and have the imputed righteousness of Christ. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit uses the law to make us aware of our sins. God's commandments will never become obsolete, although the Levitical animal sacrifices are not needed any longer after Christ's sacrifice on the cross concluded that program.

The Manifold Grace of God

“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Pet.4:10)

The most widely accepted concept of the grace of God is its power to save those who believe, in faith, the Gospel of Christ (Rom.1:16). The Gospel also reveals the righteousness of God from faith to faith (Rom.1:17ff). This means that grace, unleashed by faith, spreads from person to person by the witness of believers walking by their faith. Grace has such a nature that it cannot be obscured, for even the natural creation reveals God's love and mercy for mankind. The sun shines and the rain falls on the just and unjust alike, and God's word (spoken, written, and declared by His creation) goes forth to accomplish His will and purposes in the

lives of individuals and nations. Faith in God means being crucified with Christ and dying to sin so that one may live to God, bringing glory to Him. The so-called “carnal Christian” cannot bring glory to God, and his life lived in the flesh goes far in proving his hypocrisy and his false profession. James 2:26 states “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead, also.” Faith works!

Another feature of grace is the power it gives for dealing with trials and tribulations. “...My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2Cor.12:8). Also, the submitted believer receives power to resist sin and for cleansing his heart (James 4:7-8). The person reconciled to God has the spiritual riches of God applied to his spiritually impoverished life (2Cor.8:9, Eph.1:7-8). This infusion of power to believers brings wisdom, understanding, and sound judgment, The greater the need, the more the grace (Eph.4:7). God gives grace to the humble, but resists the proud (James 4:6).

Grace gives peace through Christ to those of faith (Rom.5:1). Grace empowers perseverance, character and hope (Rom.5:4). It is the minister of God’s love which is poured out on believers by the Spirit of Grace (Rom.5:5), who is poured out lavishly on believers by Christ Jesus our Lord (Titus 3:5-6).

To say that a person is saved by grace through faith is very true. *This is not the end of the matter, but only the beginning.* The true believer is, indeed, saved from the torments of eternal hell. However, God has a will for each one he reconciles to Himself through Christ, and that will includes the sanctification of every believer (1 Thes.4:3a and others). Each person whom God receives is predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom.8:29). When a person is born again, he is to walk in the good works that God prepared for him (Eph.2:10). He does this in

the Spirit of Grace and by the power of His might (Eph.6:10), being dead to sin and alive to God (Rom.6:11).

When a person allows the Spirit of Grace to apply the word of God to his life, he will be transformed to one who fulfills the righteous requirements of God's perfect law through loving God and his neighbor. Thus, he will be transformed to the image of Christ from glory to glory (2 Cor.3:18), and he will prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom.12:2). *In this way, both the matchless grace of God and the perfect law of God will be honored in their proper perspective, and God will receive the glory that only He deserves.*

Persons of true faith in the Lord need to serve Him acceptably in reverence and godly fear (Heb.12:28), continually offering Him the sacrifice of our praise, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name (Heb.13:15).

Thank You, Lord, for your wonderful grace: grace for salvation; grace for living; grace for dying; and, grace forever. And thank You for Your perfect law that leads us to repentance and to the obedience of faith and to holiness that we may be in Your presence forever. Amen!

Neil H. Anderson