

Bite Size Bible Study

Law & Grace #87

By Pastor Lee

The debate over Law & Grace has been ongoing since the first century AD. There are basically 4 camps to the debate.

First we have the Hebraic view, that the Torah (Law) is God's wisdom and plan for all of His creation. It not only reveals God's Character and Nature but it is His instructions for His children to live blessed lives.

Second we have a Christian point of view, which see the Law (Torah) as legalism and bondage. The thesis is that Jesus did away with the Law and replaced it with Grace. So we are free to do what seems right in our own eyes and grace will cover our mistakes.

Third we have another Christian viewpoint with a Hebraic twist. They see the Law as "Salvation by Works" which leaves what Jesus did to redeem us of little consequence. We do all the work of saving ourselves by our actions. It sees the law as a religion of bondage and dead ritual.

Fourth we have Jesus' view, which upholds the Law but adds Grace when we fall short of being able to live up to the principles of the Law.

Maybe I can make this a little clearer with an example. When each of my girls got her first car, I explained that they needed to change the engine oil regularly or the engine would fail. This is a physical law for this kind of an engine. Two of the girls who had small incomes failed to heed this law because they were trying to save money. But eventually the engine failed and expensive repairs were needed [actually I believe one engine was so bad that it totaled the car].

We can (and often do) fail to heed the Law and for a time we seem to get away with it. But the Law is there to give us guidance for our behavior. It is not there to hinder our enjoyment of life but to insure that that enjoyment continues. In some ways it may seem to be a burden in the short term but it will insure a pleasant future. Just as an inexpensive oil change may be a small burden on your pocketbook it saves you from expensive engine repair and large repair bills in the future.

The center of a religious Jew's thoughts and practice was the Law. It was the guiding principles for living a shalom (peaceful and good health) life. They attempted to apply the Law in every aspect of their lives. That included (but not limited to) agriculture, business, family relations, sexuality, the intellect, and personal relationships.

The Jews of Jesus day perceived the Torah as a divine benefit and not a burden. It was God's instructions for living a life well lived and reaping the rewards of that life. That life represented the glory of the Creator to their family and neighbors.

Contrary to what some espouse, that Jesus taught against the Law. The verses often quoted to prove that thesis, look at minor points of the Law or a misunderstanding of what the Law actually states. A close reading shows that He not only taught that the Law was good but that it was to be followed.

The Pharisees enjoyed debate. This was part of the Honor/Shame of Middle Eastern cultures. If one could verbally corner an opponent then he would gain honor while the opponent would loose honor and be shamed.

Often when the Pharisees tried to corner Jesus it was on a minor point or even a tradition that was not part of the Law. There are some references where they deliberately turn the Law around in order to try to corner Him. Jesus would always see the deception and gain the upper hand in the debate. He was totally against the hypocrisy of some groups of the Pharisees, and was quick to point it out.

Jesus plainly stated: *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.* Matthew 5:17 (NIV)

A paraphrase of this verse from a Hebraic understanding might go like this: *Do Not suppose I have any intentions of undermining Scripture {Law Prophets and Writings – the three divisions of the Tanakh} by misinterpreting it. My purpose is to establish and maintain the knowledge and observance of God's Words, not to undermine them.*

I believe that the bottom line to this controversy is not Law OR Grace – it is Law AND grace. We need both. We need the Law to have understanding of how we were designed to live. We need Grace to cover us when we fail to attain the apex of what the Law tells us is the best practice in any situation.

The Law provides us guidance, and Grace provides us forgiveness.

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