

# God's Law & God's Grace

## "His Canvas" - versus - "His Portrait"

Little did I know that something that occurred literally 50 years ago would so impact my life today. If telling you this experience from a day in a U.S. history class in high school helps you – praise God!

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The name of the teacher has long left my memory, but what he chose to do on that spring day is as fresh as this morning's dew. We were having a major test, just before the end of a grading session. I studied pages of notes from his test-review lecture, memorizing all the important dates and facts. I read and reread the chapter that we'd been studying. By bedtime I was ready.

When the bell rang for class to begin, the man stood, smiled, and said, "Today is a day like no other. If you can figure out the secret, you'll make 100." And, with that cryptic statement, he passed out the test and told us to begin. Immediately my confidence faded. While some questions were easy, most were about topics not covered either in our textbook or the man's lectures.

My emotions vacillated between frustration and fear. Grades were very important in our household. I knew that leaving the answer line to a question empty wasn't an option. A blank is never right, while a random guess at least has a fighting chance! And so I began to improvise, trying to sound as smart as a naive 16-year-old could. Maybe I could fool him with my answers.

As I looked up at nothing in particular for inspiration, I noticed a "bad kid" up at the teacher's desk. This was someone who never studied, who was always in trouble for something or other. I couldn't believe it! Instead of being reprimanded for getting out of his seat, the teacher and the "bad kid" seemed to be having a great time. Strange – not typical behavior for either one.

But... I had work to do, so I blocked out the scene and returned to my agony. After a bit I looked up and saw another kid of the same sort at the teacher's desk. If anything, the mood was even lighter. And, before the bell rang for class to be over, it seemed as if every "bad kid" in the room had taken his or her turn – many of them, multiple times – up at the history teacher's desk.

The next day I dreaded going to class. I was sure that my creative answers hadn't dazzled the man. When he stood with corrected tests in hand, he smiled the same smile from the day before and said, "Those of you who figured out yesterday's secret did well. Those who didn't, I'm sorry... you failed." Sure enough, when I got my test back, my worst fear was realized. I had failed.

Knowing the sure response at home, I fought tears. I didn't know if I would ever be able to explain. Then came an unexpected bolt of lightning. "The students who made 100 on the test were the ones who figured out the secret. They came up to my desk and asked for the answers." They did what?! Surely I'd misunderstood. My sub-par hearing doesn't always catch things right.

He went on to say, "Yesterday was the first of the month." I still didn't get it. "I decided to change the rule to celebrate April Fool's Day." Incredible! "The chance for you to get a free 100 is passed." You can imagine my silent seething. "If you were clever enough to figure out the new rule – great! If not... oh well... too bad." THAT was what his out-of-character smile was about.

God unveils things in His timing. Just recently this experience was resurrected to my consciousness. I couldn't believe it. It was such a painful moment to recall – one of perceived injustice and cruelty. I asked God, "Why are You bringing this back to my remembrance?" This time the eyes of my heart saw a gentler smile. "This is the huge difference between My Law and My Grace."

## A TALE OF TWO KINGDOMS

| **The 1st is of God's hand.** | **The 2nd is of God's heart.** |

Before God ever created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, He planted two trees there – one He called “The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” – the other He called “The Tree of Life.” Adam knew when he took the fruit from Eve that he was going against the one instruction of God not to eat from that first tree. Shame caused him to cover himself. Guilt caused him to hide.

The first man thought if he did something, maybe two things... that the Creator would be pleased, but neither “covering” nor “hiding” worked. It took the blood of an innocent animal to please God. Man's thoughts are not God's thoughts. The most inspired thing we can think of to do – falls short. Four thousand years after Adam's first “works,” Jesus gave us His Father's definition of “work.”

John 6:28 – Then they asked Him, “What must we do to do the **works** God requires?”  
John 6:29 – Jesus answered, “The **work** of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.”

Creator God is an Artist. He understands the concept of bringing value to the most important thing by placing it on a contrasting background. He puts the billow of white clouds against the sky's blue. He puts the blooming of wildflowers against the earth's green. And... He positions Grace above Law. The Old Covenant's “dos and don'ts” created the canvas for the New Covenant's “It is finished!”

When Adam and Eve ate from “The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,” they opened the door to **God's Kingdom of Law**. They exchanged innocence for conscience. From that point on they would have to deal with the temptation to ignore conscience and suffer the consequence of condemnation or follow it and deal with the trap of pride for having made a right choice. That's a “catch-22!”

In John 10:9 Jesus said, “I AM the Door;  
if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved,  
and will go in and out and find pasture.

The Door to what? **God's Kingdom of Grace**. How do we enter?  
Hebrews 11:6 says, “Now without faith it is impossible to please God.”  
Faith in what? Faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross!

In John 6:35 Jesus said, “I AM the Bread of Life;  
He who comes to Me shall never hunger,  
and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

In these days before Christ's return, He is doing a work in His Body to prepare her to be His Bride. The Church understands that “believing in the finished work of the cross” is what saves, but they haven't become convinced that “believing in the finished work of the cross” is what keeps. They see the Christian life as a “to do” list to stay in favor. Satan loves it. The Law is his best weapon.

First Corinthians 6:17 says, “But the person who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him.” A legal transaction has taken place. Sin's pardon has been purchased. Satan is no longer in charge! Yet, he's subtle. He can't change the fact that we're now sons and daughters of the Most High God, so he tries to deceive us into believing we must do works to gain God's approval and blessing.

Colossians 2:6 tells us... “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him.”

How did we receive Him?  
By believing in His finished work on the cross.  
This is the only “work” He asks of us.

# Contract versus Covenant

When men sign a legal agreement, there is the Party of the 1st Part and the Party of the 2nd Part. Each has a role to play and those roles are spelled out along with consequences for failing to do so. In the natural mind this is the default way that we think God operates. We couldn't be more wrong. A contract depends on the integrity of two – while a covenant depends on the integrity of one.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says: "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." A gift is something that is unearned, not only the moment it is received, but also from that point on. If someone gives a gift freely, then insists on measurable performance to stay qualified for the gift, he is a double-minded giver.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17,  
"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;  
**old things have passed away**; behold, **all things have become new**."

Maybe it's time we took another look at 2 Timothy 2:15... "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." This doesn't tell us to rightly divide truth from error. It tells us that God's truth has two distinct parts – **Law** and **Grace**. The Holy Spirit alerts us when we start to put **new wine** into **old wineskins**. He is our Teacher.

The Bible tells those who have received Jesus as Savior to do a lot of things: "Go and tell" – "Give" – "Love one another" – "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together" – "Feed the hungry" – "Cloth the naked" – "Visit those in prison" – "Pray without ceasing" – The list seems to go on and on. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy," so why do I feel His instructions heavy as the Commandments?

Good question!

It's time for Satan, that Deceiver in the Garden of Eden, to be exposed. His tactics haven't changed. The battlefield is still the mind. If he can twist **the blessings of the New Covenant** so they sound like **the burdens of the Old Covenant**, then he keeps us confused and inert. Jesus said, "I AM the Truth." Satan wants to convince us that those words are a lie, but remember, he is "the father of lies!"

## **OLD TESTAMENT LAW** – versus – **NEW TESTAMENT LIFE**

The Law was given as a plumb line so humans could see their sinfulness against the holiness of God. Man is unable to see his unrighteous state until he is measured against heaven's righteous standard. Without an awareness of God we can always find somebody worse with whom to compare ourselves. Judging our life to be superior stirs up feelings of pride – the very root sin that He hates most.

If after we are saved, we are a new creation, then why do we struggle so? It's as if life is a path with ditches on either side – one, condemnation when we're bad – the other, pride when we're good. Where's the joy in that? That is exactly what Paul talks about in Romans, Chapter 7, but praise God, by inspiration he kept listening to Holy Spirit's words. There really are two kingdoms of truth.

Romans 8:1 says:  
"There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,  
who walk not **after the flesh**, but **after the Spirit**."

When we keep our eyes on Jesus and His finished work on the cross, the two deceiving ditches fade.

# THE CONTRAST COULDN'T BE MORE STRIKING!

**LAW** = win versus lose

**GRACE** = win versus WIN BIG

Non-believers are still under the Old Covenant – the Law. The choice in Deuteronomy 30:19 is this:

“I set before you (1) life – and – (2) death. Choose (1) life.”

Believers are under the New Covenant – God’s Grace. The choice in John 10:10 was given by Jesus:

“I have come (1) that they might have life, – and – (2) that they might have it more abundantly.”

The problem is... believers have decided what “abundantly” means – “more of this and more of that.” But, God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways.” – Isaiah 55:8. While most natural achievers see the word “contentment” as a negative, God sees it as a positive. Sometimes it is exactly the right ingredient needed for changing His child from glory to glory.

Another word that often gets distorted is “prosperity” as implied in the Third Epistle of John, Verse 2. “Beloved, I pray above all things that you may prosper and be healthy, even as your soul prospers.” God is not against riches. After all, heaven is a place of riches beyond our imagination. However, prosper – as it relates to “even as your soul prospers” – takes on a spiritual depth all its own.

Ephesians 2:6 says:  
“And God raised us up with Christ  
and seated us with him in the heavenly realms  
in Christ Jesus.”

From the Father’s vantage point, He sees believers as having already inherited the riches of heaven. They are found in the treasure of His crucified and risen Son. Few that accept Jesus as Savior learn the joy of being satisfied with Him alone. That is the difference between life and life more abundant. The more you gaze at Him and His finished work, the richer you feel. There is nothing like it!

It’s in the gazing that you discover His purpose for you and the “works” He wants to do through you. Any crown awarded in heaven will immediately be cast at His feet because all “works” are His alone. We are merely the glove. He is the hand. What’s amazing is that with the gazing comes faith – believing ever more deeply in the breathtaking power of the presence of our Lord and Savior.

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“Life” believers seek Christ’s hand – like a baby, seeking the hand with the bottle.

“Life more abundant” believers seek Christ’s face – like a Bride, seeking the face of her Bridegroom.

The 1st believer thinks he or she must struggle to be rewarded with good things.

The 2nd believer rests in the arms of her Bridegroom, completely trusting His generosity and timing.

Romans 5:19 says:

"For just as through the **disobedience** of the one man the many were made **sinners**, so also through the **obedience** of the one man the many will be made **righteous**."

**We are born through the blood-line of the 1st Adam.**  
**We are reborn through the blood-line of the 2nd Adam.**

Romans 6:23 says:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

There is no middle ground or in-between gray area. Yet, most believers mentally straddle the fence. That's because Satan deceives us into thinking that the Christian life is a blend of "wages" and "gift." Wages imply "do!" Gift implies "done!" The fact that "wages" is plural in the Greek is significant. It's continual. The fact that "gift" is singular is equally significant. It's the message – "It is finished."

The gift has two components – **Christ's BLOOD** (His death) – and **Christ's BREATH** (His resurrection).

Hebrews 7:25 says:

"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

Jesus Himself is the Bridge between Heaven and Earth. We don't need to go through others to pray.

Hebrews 4:16 says:

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of **grace**, that we may obtain mercy, and find **grace** to help in time of need."

When God repeats Himself in Scripture, it is because the word is really important. The first "**grace**" refers to the very throne on which Christ sits. This is "**grace**" personified in the very Person of Jesus. The second "**grace**" refers to the kind of relationship believers would enjoy if they only understood it. This is also what Christ died to give us – "**grace**" not only for Heaven, but "**grace**" for living on Earth.

Salvation has two parts:

**JESUS DIED TO GIVE LIFE** & **LIFE MORE ABUNDANTLY.**  
"I AM the Life." – John 14:6      "I AM the Vine." – John 15:1

Second Corinthians 5:17 says:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

This GIFT not only includes the **pardon He purchased with His blood** but also the **perfect life He lived**. The secret to "**life more abundantly**" is believing what God says – **that He really does see us in Christ**. Abiding in Him is about discovering the benefits of our position. A poor example is being inside a car where its benefits are reality – as opposed to being outside the car where its benefits are theoretical.

Yet, so many believers are living the Christian life as though they have one foot in and one foot out. The Deceiver convinces them that the "**canvas**" and the "**portrait**" are of equal worth. They aren't. Since Creator God ordained that "Two things cannot occupy the same place at the same time," we must choose the object of our focus. Will it be the canvas – **Law**? Or, will it be the portrait – **Grace**?

**Focusing on JESUS, the Author and Finisher of our faith, ushers in the "life more abundantly" reality!**