

Law or Grace—Which?

The Two Covenants Contrasted

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PREFACE

REFERENCES USED IN THIS PUBLICATION

- **American Standard Version** (ASV or AV) is a version of the Bible that was released in 1901. It soon came to have other names, such as the American Revised Version, the American Standard Revision, the American Standard Revised Bible, and the American Standard Edition. By the time its copyright was renewed in 1929, it had come to be known by its present name, the American Standard Version.
- **Diaglott** is a two-language polyglot translation, of the New Testament by Benjamin Wilson, first published in 1864. It is an interlinear translation with the original Greek text and a word-for-word English translation in the left column, and a full English translation in the right column.
- **King James Version** (KJV) references are used throughout this publication unless otherwise noted.
- **Revised Version** (RV) (or English Revised Version) of the Bible is a late 19th-century British revision of the King James Version of 1611. It was the first and remains the only officially authorized and recognized revision of the King James Bible.
- **Wuest:** Kenneth Samuel Wuest (1893–1962) was a noted New Testament Greek (Κοινή) scholar of the mid-20th century...produced his own English translation of the New Testament (the Wuest Expanded Translation – abbreviated WET) based on Nestle's critical text.

Note: *Definitions of references pulled from WikipediA, The Free Encyclopedia, January 2013.*

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*"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.3:20]

*"For by **Grace** are ye saved through **Faith**."* [Eph.2:8]

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them anymore." [Heb.12:18-19]

We have, in the above block of Scripture, a contrast between the 2 Covenants—that of **Law** and that of **Grace**. It is a subject upon which the greatest misunderstanding exists. In fact, we may go further and say that the grossest ignorance prevails regarding the purpose of the giving of The Law. Man can readily understand that God should give a law; but His purpose in so doing is far from man's thoughts. For when we view that wondrous sight of the great and terrible God, coming down upon Mount Sinai amid the majesty and convincing display of His glory and power, speaking to Israel the 10 tremendous commands as to what they shall do and not do; we naturally conclude that this is God's perfect and legitimate way of dealing with His people (read Exo.19). He is Sovereign. Man is but a subject in His realm; the creature and work of His own hand. God has the prerogative to make laws for His creatures to obey. In fact, it is the only possible relationship of the Creator to His creatures. This view is in perfect harmony with man's reason, and accordingly he explains this majestic scene at Sinai from this natural standpoint. Hence, the misconception arises that the relationship of Israel to God must, of course, depend upon their obedience to His Law. They imagine His election of them also must be founded upon their behavior. Men think that this is the reason He spoke this fiery Law to them; that they, by keeping this Law and walking in every one of its requirements, may gradually become His peculiar people. For they argue, "Do we not thus read in this very connection, '*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*' [Exo.19:5]?"

**WE CAN NEVER UNDERSTAND GOD NOR HIS WONDROUS
DEALINGS WITH MAN, UNTIL THIS QUESTION OF THE GIVING OF THE
LAW IS UNDERSTOOD.**

Let us then, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, seek to discover the purpose that God had in placing Israel under The Law. For we must remember that, up to this point, they have been under absolute grace. That is, His favor toward them has not been conditional upon their works nor their worthiness but on His own faithfulness to His promises. God had definitely promised **ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB** that He...

- was to be the God of their seed,
- would give them the land of Canaan,
- would multiply them beyond measure, and
- would make them a worldwide blessing.

These promises were all unconditional, and God must be true to these promises. They proceeded from His heart of love to the patriarchs; not because of the patriarchs' goodness or merit, but because "*The Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day*" [Deu.10:15]. "*For if the inheritance (that is, Abraham's inheritance or blessing from God) be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise*" [Gal.3:18]. The Lord gave to Adam 1 commandment, which he transgressed; but, from Adam down until The Law was given unto Israel upon Mount Sinai, there was no commandment given to man. God dealt with the human race in different ways and under various conditions; but there was no legal basis on which to merit the favor of God.

Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, looked unto the promise of God [Rom.4:13, 18-21]. He was not concerned with a thousand and one legal observances and ordinances (no, nor even one) to merit God's approval. He was wholly occupied with what God said that He would do for him. Abraham expected the fulfillment of those promises. He was under no responsibility but to believe God. The Lord had put Himself, if we may so speak of God's grace, under obligation to Abraham to fulfill His own Word to him. That man walked in the full favor and fellowship of God, because of his faith not his works. That covenant of grace which Jehovah made with Abraham [Gen.15] can never be set aside by Law, as we read,

"And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." [Gal.3:17]

Furthermore, if The Law had been introduced in Abraham's day and he had failed to obey its every precept, the failure would not have made void the covenant of grace nor have caused him the loss of his inheritance; for **Grace** was promised to him unconditionally. This is a great point. The covenant was made with Abraham upon the principle of grace, not law; upon faith, not works.

But, says someone, "What is the purpose of The Law?" This is a pertinent question. When we remember that the patriarch (Abraham) enjoyed the fellowship of God without any law, it does seem strange that God should afterward put his seed under The Law. But, God's ways are past understanding, unless we believe just what He says without any reasoning. The Lord had definite results to accomplish by the giving of The Law, which He reveals to the poor and contrite spirit seeking the light.

First, let us see if The Law was given for the purpose of regeneration.

"If there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law." [Gal.3:21 RV]

Here is the plain declaration of the Word of God that **The Law could not make alive**, and this was the first thing needed by man. He is dead to God, having no spiritual life and no understanding of God nor of His ways, until he is **born again**. The Law was not able to give him life. The 10 Commandments from Mount Sinai did insist that man should be alive, love God, and serve Him; but, they could not give him the power to do it. We may plant a dead branch of a tree in fruitful soil, and water and attend to it

assiduously; but that will not give life to that dead limb. So it is in spiritual matters. Man must have life first of all, before there is any use in giving him spiritual culture such as exhorting or teaching him.

Furthermore, **man had no righteous standing with God**. He had no credit. He was bankrupt and without any valuable assets. The failure of the 1st Adam plunged the whole of mankind into ruin.

*“Through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.”
[Rom.5:19 RV]*

They have never been able to recover themselves from the depths into which they were plunged, nor reinstate themselves in the favor of God. They could not attain a righteousness of their own, nor a standing with the Lord. Man can have no confidence toward God until he is assured of being able to stand before Him in His favor. Some folks believe that The Law was given for this purpose, that man might be justified by fulfilling its requirements. Let us see by the Word.

“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.3:20]

He who gave **The Law** positively states that it **was not given for the purpose of justification**. Man cannot get life through the keeping of The Law; neither can he attain a righteousness through obedience to its precepts. *“No flesh,”* regardless of its morality or its keeping of the 10 Commandments, can obtain the favor of the Lord. Justification of mankind is upon a different basis altogether.

This is where man’s reason begins to rebel. He can understand, in some measure, the inability of The Law to make alive; but, he insists that man must obey The Law, in order to keep alive. “How can a man be righteous,” he argues, “except he does righteous deeds?” He would thus make his standing in God’s favor dependent upon his works. But God insists that no man is *“justified in His sight”* (whatever his standing in man’s estimation) *“by the deeds (works) of the law.”* Yet God gave those 10 Commandments and bade the people obey them.

Man’s reason fails here altogether. This is beyond his comprehension, that God should give a law for man to obey and then say he would get no credit for the doing of it. God goes even further and says, *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse”* [Gal.3:10a]. That is, any seeking of holiness by the keeping of The Law brings with it a curse, because 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”* [Gal.3:10b]. So, far from becoming holy by their efforts at Law keeping, they are bringing themselves under condemnation. Nay more, doom already hangs over them.

Someone may ask, “Why is there a curse upon the law keeper?” Because he *“continueth not in **ALL** things which are written in the book of the law to do them”* That is, he does not fulfill **ALL** The Law’s requirements. He is not capable of doing so. The Law cries, *“Thou shalt not covet.”* But, man has a covetous heart, over which he has no control whatever. He may control his hand, and prevent it from

executing the desire of his heart; but he has no power over his heart. This remains unchanged, regardless of his efforts in this direction, even as the Ethiopian's skin and the leopard's spots [Jer.13:23].

HE KNOWETH OUR FRAME

"For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." [Ps 103:14]

Now this was no secret with God. He knew all about the condition of the man's heart, before He gave The Law from Sinai. He knew beforehand that even His chosen exclusive nation Israel would never meet its requirements. It was impossible. No man has ever kept The Law of God but the God-Man Jesus Christ. God knew that His people would fail. He had made provision for the failure, before it came to pass. He is never taken unawares. That is the marvelous part of these wonderful disclosures of Jehovah and His ways. We learn that before the people sinned by breaking The Law, God had the provision for His broken Law all ready, though it was but a type of the real provision of Calvary.

This provision represented Christ in all of His perfection and sufficiency. It was what saved Israel from being immediately destroyed when they made the golden calf. They were forming this image at the very time the Lord was giving to Moses the pattern of His provision to meet their need. That was an exhibition of His grace, though the people had not yet outwardly broken The Law. Moses was still up on the mount with God. He entered immediately into the mind of God, and interceded successfully for the people whom Jehovah threatened to consume in His anger. Thus, he became their mediator. Yet Moses knew not the gravity of their sin.

"And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount." [Exo.32:15-16, 19]

Moses judged the sin of Israel by his action. He was in the will of God in breaking the tables of The Law. He showed out what Israel had done by their worship of the golden calf. They had broken The Law, for the 10 Commandments are as one. They are as a chain—break one link and the whole chain is broken. *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all"* [Jam.2:10]. The people made a calf to represent the Almighty God who had brought them out of Egypt with His own outstretched arm defeating all the power of Pharaoh against them. They manifested their own condition by their graven image. Their conception of God was according to their own poor hearts. They were **ungodly**, unlike God; so, of necessity, their idol partook of their character. It was unlike God.

This was the terrible breach of the covenant under pure Law. The people failed immediately. It was no sooner given than they broke it. The keeping of it, however, Israel readily undertook; for they were ignorant of themselves and

of God. The great lesson for Israel, and for us also (for that chosen people represent man under the most favorable environment), is that they were sinners and needed atonement not law. This, The Law, proved to them *“that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”* [Rom.3:19b]. This is not only historic, but it is intensely personal; for every one of us needs the lesson.

Not one of us is able to stand one moment under God's Law. It takes more than learning the necessary lesson that we are **UNGODLY**, to find that we are **without strength**. We do not need assistance to keep The Law, but salvation from its demands. *“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”* [Rom.5:6]. Remember, that *“by the law is the knowledge of sin”* [Rom.3:20]. The Law of God, being infinitely holy in its character and requirements, must always condemn unholy, sinful man. Some of these poor creatures imagine that God will have mercy because they do the best they can, that He will balance their good deeds against their bad deeds and so mete out justice accordingly. Such an idea proceeds from their own degenerate minds. It is utterly foreign to the absoluteness of God's justice. Even on earth, the breaking of law carries with it a penalty. For a convicted murderer to expect release from punishment, because his life had been respectable, would be counted the height of presumption. The law has been broken, there must be satisfaction. Nor would the plea that he will murder no more (made by sinners constantly) be accepted. Neither past goodness nor future promises can atone for a broken law. Suppose the murderer tells the judge that, if he shows mercy and pardons him, he will work for him the remainder of his days. Suppose the judge accepts the service and releases the guilty man. The world would cry out against such rank bribery.

This is the very plea that sinners constantly bring before a just God. They make Him weaker and lower His standard of justice beneath that of an earthly judge. God must punish the man who sins. His nature necessitates it. His government demands satisfaction for the broken Law. Human reason justifies it. Human conscience testifies and warns of it. Finally, God's eternal Word declares it. He *“will by no means clear the guilty”* [Exo.34:7]. Never can God forgive the sinner until his sin has been righteously dealt with.

THE OFFICE OF THE LAW

“The law came in besides, that the trespass might abound.”
[Rom.5:20 ASV]

The Law came in that sin might show itself as sin, not to God, for He knew of its existence, but to man who was ignorant. The Law, therefore, **reveals man's sin to himself; then it condemns and curses him**. This is the office of The Law. This is its purpose—it shuts up all of us under sin [Gal.3:23]. It proceeds upon principles of absolute justice—no sentiment, no mercy, no love. It fulfills its ministration—death. Furthermore, *“by the law is the knowledge of sin”* [Rom.3:20]. We do not know what is sin until we hear the voice of The Law, *“Thou shalt not...”* It demands righteousness from man, defines transgression, imposes penalty, and demands execution of the same for disobedience. Thus, it makes ready for the Gospel of Grace, in the which Gospel *“the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live”* [Joh.5:25].

God can reveal the rich provision that He has made for man's salvation, only in proportion as he is conscious of his need. This is the reason that He gave The Law again to Israel after their failure. But this time it is in the mingled manner—neither pure grace nor pure law. This was the covenant under which the people entered the land of Canaan. This mingling of **Law** and **Grace** was typified in Abraham's home. Sarah and Isaac stand for grace and its fruit. Hagar and Ishmael stand for The Law and its fruits. Hence, believers under the covenant of Law were called children not sons; and saints today, who are under Law, are also called children [Gal.4:3, 19, 22-31].

Do you marvel then, that the living omniscient God did not give The Law to man with the expectation of his keeping it—neither for the purpose of bringing forth any righteousness, holiness, or goodness from man? For it had just the opposite effect. It brought out man's utter badness. This is its righteous verdict on the whole old creation: Helpless, “*ungodly*,” “*sinners*” and “*enemies*” [Rom.5:6, 8, 10].

God must strip man of every merit, leaving him naked and helpless, before He can display His grace. It is not a comparing of one man with another, not that one is a little better or worse than the other, but all are leveled to the one measure—guilty before God, absolutely shut up to judgment, no difference between man and man. All are lost sinners, a great mass of undone and ruined humanity, without any merit whatever to recommend them to the favor of God. He had to give The Law. That was its purpose—to shut up to the bar of Divine Justice, a condemned guilty sinner, without one ray of light or hope except in the mercy of Jehovah. He was obliged to do this, in order to display His grace. It needs such a background to set it off. For, if man had any merit, God's grace would be mingled with works; and that would not be grace.

“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.”
[Rom.11:6]

That is, the apostle insists, it is not a mixture of the two. We must settle this fact, and choose whether we will try to save ourselves by our own works or let God save us by His grace.

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.” [Exo.32:30]

Moses' offer here, to make atonement, was not accepted. That was impossible; although the devotion which prompted it was recognized and, no doubt, rewarded. It was the Spirit of Christ in Moses, which caused him to identify himself with Israel in their sin. The same Spirit breathes through the prophets. Our own Apostle Paul was constrained by the same spirit of sacrifice for the Lord's people when he cried, “*For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*” [Rom.9:3]. But Christ alone could make atonement; for He only, of all men, had no penalty attached to His life. God was looking to “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” [Rev.13:8], else He could never have overlooked His broken Law and continued with this sinful nation.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest." [Exo.34:1]

The tables of The Law are renewed, and the commingling of **Grace** and **Law** is fully seen in this newly made covenant. But notice that, before the Lord can ever manifest any grace whatever, He must judge their sin. This He does by refusing to take His place in their midst. Had He done so, they would have been consumed by His holiness. They are commanded to put off their ornaments and await His judgment in a repentant attitude. As a further sign of their condemnation, Moses removed the tent from the midst of the camp which was the ordained place for the worship of the Lord and pitched it outside afar off and called it, "*The tent of meeting*" [Exo.33:7 RV]. All that sought the Lord had to go out to that tent. There the Lord spoke "*face to face*" with Moses. All the people saw "*the pillar of cloud*" standing at the entrance of the tent. It was there that Moses was especially seen as the type of the far greater Prophet whom he represented—Christ the Son, in perfect communion with His Father. All depended upon the Mediator...He bridged the gulf which sin had made.

Moses entered fully into the mind of God, and took the place of grace which was offered him; but even that was not yet the full grace which the Gospel reveals. For to Moses, who desired to behold His glory, the Lord could only answer in a qualified manner.

"And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." [Exo.33:19-23]

Moses could but see the "*back parts*" of God's glory. He had to be covered with the Divine Hand while the Lord passed by. This was most significant. God's grace, in which is revealed His greatest glory, could not be seen by Moses as representative of Law; even though The Law was mingled with grace. Therefore, God is not known in any deep measure by believers who are under Law. His face cannot be seen. The mercy declared to Moses was only the "*back parts*" of His glory—He **forgave iniquity and transgression and sin**. He even went on, in some measure, with those sinners who merited death; that was grace. But He **will by no means clear the guilty**; that is Law. There is no justification of the ungodly under The Law, no "*good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people*," [Luk.2:10], no revealed ground of righteousness through which grace might reign.

Thus we see that Law, whatever is mixed with it, is still but Law. The least tincture of Law mars the character of grace, dulls the glory of God, and deprives the soul of joy and blessing. But that was God's appointed way of showing Israel their sin. Moses wrote The Law upon the 2nd tables of stone. Consider the following:

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest." [Exo.34:1]

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him." [Exo.34:27-29]

The Lord had written the 1st purely legal covenant and no glory was reflected in Moses' face. But now, Moses' face is seen to shine, although he veils the glory while speaking to the people. By his action, he outwardly manifests the effect of even a mixture of **Law** and **Grace**. In a measure, it hides the goodness of God from man, and thus veils His glory. Israel could not see, the veil of unbelief was upon their hearts. For the nation of Israel, this veil of unbelief will be removed when they turn to the Lord [2Co.3:16]. For The Law will then have served its purpose and convinced them of their need of a Savior, and His grace will then be seen by Israel.

According to the pattern which God has given him, Moses put those tables of stone, upon which he had written the 10 Commandments, into The Ark. That Ark was Christ in type and the Law of God was within His heart. He magnified and made it honorable by His subjection to its every requirement, both inwardly and outwardly [Isa.42:21]. As it is written of Him,

"I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." [Psa.40:8]

He took upon Himself all of man's responsibility as to God's broken Law. The Ark with its bloodstained Mercy Seat was all that saved Israel from the consuming fire of God's judgment. It alone was the basis of His continuing to dwell among that rebellious people. Of course, this which we have just been considering is only the shadow...Christ is the Substance. The lesson which the shadow teaches, and which we would emphasize, is that only on the basis of His atoning work can God dwell among us.

Christ, not The Law, is our Salvation. Christ's righteousness, not our own supposed righteousness, is our covering.

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." [Rom.10:4]

"Christ...is our life." [Col.3:4]

"Thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." As was said, man under Law cannot see the face of God. When saints attempt to keep The Law, His face is turned away. They only see the shadowy, distant, august Presence of Jehovah. To believers, The Law is behind God's back.

The Law justified God by condemning the sinner. But Christ ended that condemnation by taking it upon Himself and dying in the sinners' place. Hence, The **Law** has been silenced forever. Having done its work and

fulfilled its office, The **Law** steps down and out and makes way for the **Grace** of God.

Through Our Tears

There are songs that we sing when we're happy,
And songs that we breathe when we're gay;
Oft we sing when it seems heaven's sunshine
Is flooding our pilgrim way;
There are songs that we sing in the shadow
When our hearts are filled with fears;
But the songs that are richest and dearest
Are the songs that we breathe through our tears.

It is easy to sing in the noontide
When everything seems to go right,
And there's really no sacrifice needed
To sing when the skies are all bright;
But when in the midst of our sorrow
We sing with the voice of good cheer,
We're making the true heavenly music
In the songs that we breathe with a tear.

Some may think songs are only for gladness,
Others think they are only for mirth,
But the song from the heart bent in anguish
Has a million-fold greater worth.
Let me sing when my heart's beating blithely,
Let me sing when my way is most drear,
For I know that the music is sweetest
In the songs that I breathe with a tear.

—Clarence Simeon Way

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