

The Christian and the Law, part 2: grace and truth through Jesus (Exodus 20 Excursus; reading John 1:1-18)

The Apostle Paul stated definitively that we are not under law but under grace. But we struggle at times to know what that looks like. Starting with John 1:17 (rather than Paul) there are helpful truths towards understanding how we should relate to the law.

I. *Jesus, the Word, is the perfect glorious incarnation of God's grace and truth.*

1. *This is stated in John 1:1-18.* The Word is God (v 1; cf. vv 3-4). He became flesh (v 14). His glory was manifested (v 14; cf 2:11; 13:31). He was full of grace and truth.
2. *This alludes to God's revelation of Himself in Exodus 34:6.* (Consider the connection between the Exodus account and John 1:14 and 18, i.e., His glory and not seeing God.) God revealed Himself to Moses as abounding in lovingkindness and truth, characteristics which John seems to summarize with "grace and truth" and ascribe to Jesus, the Word who became flesh. Truth is found throughout the Gospel and frequently in the letters of John. When "grace" is understood as "lovingkindness" and represented by "love", we see it frequently in John's writings. These are essential, eternal attributes of God fully possessed by Jesus.
3. *This resulted in an advancement beyond the Law.* The NIV's "one blessing after another" might otherwise be translated by "grace in place of grace." This requires understanding the law as possessing truth and grace, though in a limited fashion. Jesus brought grace and truth in a way far beyond what was contained in the Law. Cf. Hebrews 1:1-3. Jesus is the truth and the incarnation of God who is love. Hence, He far exceeds that which was present in the law. Certain examples illustrate the change well: the sacrificial system ultimately fulfilled in Christ, ceremonial laws being just the shadows of the substance who was Christ, and the freedom now to worship in spirit and in truth unrestricted by location.

But these changes are for those today who have by faith become united with Jesus Christ.

II. *The redemption provided by God in Jesus places the believer in Christ and the Spirit of Christ in the believer.*

1. *This is explained in Galatians 3 and Romans, where the contrast to the law is also seen.*
 - a. Abraham was blessed with justification by faith (Gal 3:6-9) and not by the law (vv 10-12). Christ redeemed us so that that blessing and the Spirit might come to us through Jesus Christ (v 14). The many are blessed (vv 8, 14) though the promise came to the one Seed (v 16) because by faith they become sons of God (v 26), clothed with Christ (v 27), united together in Christ (v 28), and belonging to (v 29).
 - b. Paul expresses a similar reasoning in Romans, i.e., that the believer is united with Christ and hence from sin in order to live to God (chapter 6) and that those belonging to Christ have the Spirit (8:9), are led by Him and have their minds set of what He desires.
2. *This was foretold in the Old Testament in the promises made about a new covenant.* The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) included God's promise to put His law on their minds and write it on their hearts. In Ezekiel 36:34 God adds to that that He will put His Spirit in them. In the New Covenant there is an essential heart change, the law moves from something external to something internal, and the active agent in the new life is the Spirit of God in their hearts.
3. *This change to the New Covenant was brought into effect by the death of Jesus Christ.* The Old Covenant as well as the New were brought into effect by shedding blood, the latter being the blood of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 11:25). Believers today benefit because they are in Christ, the Seed of Abraham, receiving as well the gift of the Spirit.

III. *Grace and truth are integrated into the new life of the believer.*

1. *This is true of truth because the Spirit is also called the Spirit of truth and Christ is the truth.*
 - a. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6) and the Spirit is the Spirit of truth. The Spirit within the believer gives testimony to Jesus.
 - b. Believers are to live life according to the truth (1 John 1:6, 8; 2:4) and have the truth in them.
 - c. Truth, which is greater than the law, drives us to look beyond the surface of the law, as Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount and with the rich young ruler. The eternal righteousness of God has always been the standard, even before the Mosaic Law was given. In the Spirit of truth and the incarnate Truth we have much more than the Law.
2. *This integration of truth and grace into the believer's life is true of grace because God is love.* By His Spirit the God of love dwells in believers and enables them to love others (cf. 1 John 4:7). Furthermore, God's grace, exercised and displayed in the death of Jesus, becomes the believer's educator and disciplinarian to avoid sin and draw near to God (Titus 2:11-14; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

The child of God is not under law but under grace. Grace has a much authority as did law, but it must be one of the other, under law or under grace. If we are God's children, then God's grace will pursue us and not let us go. And that is good, but we must choose to solely trust God.

We approach the Law then, as well as the rest of Scripture, with a consistent, Spirit-led hermeneutic. And we approach it with a right attitude, i.e., as those who already have a righteous relationship with God in Christ. As in a healthy, beautiful marriage we don't do good to get forgiveness; it has been granted in Christ. We don't do good, to get blessings; we have all blessings already in Christ. Though we live mindful of the judgment seat of Christ, our best attitude is one that desires to know God and bring joy to Him according to His perfect will, in full accord with grace and truth.