

# **The Law Versus Grace Debate**

## **The Ground Work**

By Mark E. Benjamin

### **Why The Great Debate**

There is a continuous, and sometimes very passionate, debate on Law versus Grace. I have seen opinions all over the map on this and at first glance, a lot of them seem to be correct in their conclusions, although at times they are at the extreme opposite ends of the spectrum. I believe it is time for me to state VoydPhil's position on the matter. But before getting in the depths and nuances of the matter, there is a good deal of definitions and opening statements that need to preface the subject.

First off, since this is a very involved subject it will take a few VoydPhil-ings to cover it all. I want to purposely break this up in to more manageable parts and (for logistical purposes) keep the length of the VoydPhil-ings to the size of others that have been published. Therefore, this first part will be devoted to setting the stage, the second part will be exploring the facts and possible scenarios on how Law and Grace work (and don't work), the last part will be what conclusions we can make and attempt to piece it all together.

You might ask, if there are already lots of others that have put this subject down on paper why am I going down a supposedly well beaten path? Well, for several reasons. One being that I have not gone down it until now, and it is easy to miss out on the teachings and blessing of our Lord if we do not let Him lead us. Over the many months of studying this subject I have come to grow closer to God and He has taught me various things along the way – and most of them have nothing to do with Law or Grace. (I'm sure some of those other lessons will show up in future VoydPhil-ings.) I do feel that going off of what others have written or said on a subject may be a good way to get some thoughts going and to see what beliefs are out there, but we must let God and His Holy Spirit lead us in our own convictions. The way we can truly let that happen is to let God – not others – teach us what He would have us to learn. That certainly includes what I write or say in this and all other VoydPhil-ings. Please take what I put down as only a starting point, and then do your own research, praying, and listening to God and what He wants to show you out of the experience.

In addition to this, I want to journey on this road that many have trod to have it stated what VoydPhil's position is on Law and Grace. But of course the main reason for all of this is to help in bridging the gap between Christians and Jews. As with everything within VoydPhil, the purpose is to produce an environment that is more conducive in developing relationships between Christians and Jews, so as to have a better chance at leading the Jews to their Messiah, Jesus.

Certainly, as with any spiritual subject, the words that I will be putting down here do not represent all that can be – or should be – said about the topic. The countless facets will obviously not be able to be written in a few short VoydPhil-ings. But my intent will be to touch on the ones that I feel are the more important... or perhaps the less thought about. And, as I said before, the points that can help in filling that void both between Christians and Jews as well as within us.

### **Definition Of Law**

Let's start our journey with a few definitions. Some stakes in the ground as a guide and also something that can't be refuted by any of the viewpoints that are out there. Hopefully this will at least answer a few beginning questions as well. Questions like: What – technically – are Law and Grace? When did they come in to being? Who set them up and is responsible for them? In addition I hope to generate many more questions that will spur us on to the other parts of this study.

The definitions that I found for Law that pertain to our subject are this: "A rule of conduct or procedure established by custom, agreement, or authority" and "The body of principles or precepts held to express the divine will, especially as revealed in the Bible." Let's take these two apart and then meld them in to one definition that we can call our own for this study. Something that we can come back to as what we have defined as Law.

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So taking the part dealing with ownership and where it comes from we see the “authority” or “divine will”. This is of course God Himself. He is the authority and it is His divine will. The Laws are His and only His. They are not what people want them to be or have changed them to be so they will fit in with their own ideas. The Law is God’s, and no ones else’s.

They are a set of rules or principles that let us know how our conduct should be. A list of do’s and don’ts. They are the principles that God wants us to live by. And they come from the Bible, or at least “especially” the Bible.

So in basic terms – and what our new definition will be – Law is what God has decided how His people must act as revealed to us from His Bible.

In physical terms – and this can be where some debate starts – the Law is the first five books of the Bible, also known as the Law of Moses or the Pentateuch. In other words, this is the part of the Bible that has all the do’s and don’ts of God written down. Many will say that the Law includes the oral law, but since others will argue against that, for now we will set that part aside. It is fairly safe to say that any time in the Bible you see God say to his people, “do this” or “don’t do that” we can conclude that it is a way that God wants us to act and therefore – by our definition – a Law of God’s. So it is not just the Ten Commandments. It certainly includes them, and they are the main point of God’s Law, but there are other things put down that fall under our definition.

### Definition Of Grace

What about Grace? This is defined as “The state of being protected or sanctified by the favor of God.” This definition is pretty good just as it is, but let’s still take it apart for better understanding. To start let’s focus on the first part of that for a moment. We can see here that it is a state of being, not an automatic given property of ourselves, but one that we can become. We have not always been Holy, but we need to be Holy if we are to enter into the “state of being” Holy.

The next part, to be sanctified – or another word for that is to be Holy or righteous. This is a very key part to the entire subject of Law and Grace. We will see later how and why this is so important, but for now we must understand that Grace has to do with being righteous. We must also know that in **Romans 3:10** it say that “... **There is no one righteous, not even one;**” So righteousness or being sanctified is not something any of us has. But again, it is something that we can enter into; the state of being righteous.

Notice here, as with Law, the originator is God. But with Law it is the “will” of God, His wants or demands. With Grace it is His “favor” or act of kindness. God wants us to act a certain way – His Law; He also wants us to be righteous as well. For this though it is through His favor or kindness. This is a major difference between Law and Grace. One has a more forceful connotation to it while the other is a bit more forgiving. Both show God’s desire for our lives, but in different ways.

It is important to keep that in mind that in both definitions it is God that originates the two. It is not the Christians that came up with the idea of Grace and the Jews with Law. Neither group has ownership of them or can claim them as something that is for their religion and only their religion; although, many on both sides do this very thing. We must understand that both Law and Grace are God’s and His alone. He came up with them and established what they are, when they came in to being and why. No one on earth has the authority or power to change the workings of Law or Grace, they belong to God and only He determines how they work.

### Timing Of The Law

Although there is some debate as to the exact timing of when the Law was given out, what we need to keep in mind is that the Law did indeed have an exact time that it was handed down from God. The Ten Commandments were given to Moses around 1446 BC when he stayed with God on Mount Sinai. Before this, there

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were no commandments of God, no Law for the people to follow. His Law was not known before this point and therefore no interaction could be made with it. Yes, God did make commands before this point in time. For instance, saying to Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree in the Garden of Eden. This was definitely a command given to them specifically. But His commandments for His entire people to follow were not until Moses received the tablets from God on the mountain.

If it was only then that God's Law became a factor, what was done before the Law was given out? Here we already start to complicate the subject of Law and Grace and add a question that must be answered. The quick answer is that we have to add a third main factor, "before Law". This is one of the areas I do not see others addressing, or at least not that often or in a manner worthy of its significance. It is always just Grace and Law; never Grace, Law and before Law. But we will get in to this point later on, because it has a lot of bearing on how we fit it all together. Also, if people better understood – or at least gave it the proper merit – the before Law would help to clarify how Law and Grace work.

### **Timing Of Grace**

Grace was given when Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead. Just like the act of presenting Moses with the Commandments of God initiated the concept of Law, so too did the final act of Jesus initiate Grace. So for about 2,000 years Grace has been in play.

There is also an interesting pondering about the bringing in to being the act of Grace that we will touch on as well. Something that I have yet to see anyone mention. But here again, I do believe it is important in the understanding of how all this comes together in to something that works and was planned by God from the very beginning, and how to better understand and witness to the Jews.

Of course one major question we will need to address is, did the arrival of Grace cancel Law? Like watching a single channel on the TV, did one show stop and a new show start? Maybe the show of "Before Law" ended and then "Law" started until the top of the hour and then it stopped and a new show "Grace" started. Or is it like multiple channels and all three shows are going at once? And the viewer can switch from one channel to another. Perhaps it is something entirely different? By the end of all this I hope to have answered that.

One final point we need to remember as we explore Law, Grace and before Law; we need to remember who God is and who He is not. God is not a god of confusion; He is a god of order. He is also a god that has all things under His control for He has made all things, including Law and Grace, so none of this has taken on any characteristics that God did not allow. Also, He wants only the best for us and He is a loving and kind god. But, He is also Holy, pure and righteous. Because of all of this, there are certain things that He must do and cannot do. He must love His creation and want to be with it, including you and me. But he cannot have anything to do with unrighteousness or sin, which all people are. So He will provide a way for you and me to understand all of this and to make a way for us to commune with Him.

I hope and pray that you will be encouraged and develop a better understanding on Grace, Law and before Law as we take a journey down this road together.