

Faith Pulpit

A Test Case for Distinguishing Law, Gospel, and Grace: Hebrews 10:1–39

1For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purged, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

5Therefore, when He came into the world, He said . . . 9?Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.” He takes away the first that He may establish the second. 10By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

14For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. 15And the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, 16?This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” 17then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 18Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

19Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23Let us hold fast the

confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

26For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." 31It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: 33partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; 34for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. 35Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 37 "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. 38Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." 39But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Gospel

In the first eighteen verses of this chapter, the writer compares the gospel and its benefits enjoyed by believers today to benefits enjoyed by Old Testament believers. We know these verses are related to the gospel because they do not make demands, but instead they assure us our sins are forgiven because of Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf. Note the following facts:

- (1) Year-by-year sacrifices in the Old Testament were only a shadow of good things to come and therefore could not reach the two-fold goal (the verb translated "make perfect" means to reach a goal) of a once-for-all purging of sins and bringing an awareness of that once-for-all purging (vv. 1, 2).
- (2) While the year-by-year (Day of Atonement) sacrifices brought God's promise of cleansing from all their previous sins because the sacrifice was an atonement, or covering, for sins (Lev. 16:30), those sacrifices could not actually take away sins (Heb. 10:4). The annual sacrifice also reminded the worshiper that last year a sacrifice had to be made (Heb. 10:3), implying that between now and next

year another sacrifice would have to be made.

(3) Christ came to do God's will (vv. 7, 9), and by that will we have been sanctified by the once-for-all offering of Jesus Christ for our sins (vv. 10–12). By His once-for-all offering Christ has reached the goal that the year-by-year sacrifices could not reach (cf. vv. 2, 14).

(4) The Holy Spirit witnesses to us that our sins are no longer remembered by God because they have been pardoned and taken away, which we call remission of sins (v. 18).

Grace

Grace makes demands of today's believer in verses 19–25. Notice that these demands are in the form of the "let us" exhortations. However, these demands are not threats to terrify us, but rather they describe things God has made available to enable us to live for Him.

(1) Since we have boldness to come directly into God's presence because of Christ's death for us and because we know Christ our High Priest is ministering on our behalf, "let us draw near" (vv. 19–22). God has made prayer available to us.

(2) "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (v. 23). God has made His Word available to us, and God's faithfulness is attached to His promises.

(3) "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works." God has made His people available to us, and therefore we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (vv. 24, 25).

Law

Law is recognized by the demands and threats that terrify. These demands and threats are not directed to the believer but to those Jews on the fringe who have rejected the gospel and now wish to return to Judaism. Notice the words in verses 26–28: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses."

Some think this text is a warning to believers, but note well the three-fold description of the person in view: "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (v. 29).

We also recognize law in this chapter by God's statement, "But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him" (v. 38). That this statement is directed to unbelievers can be seen in the writer's closing remarks: "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the

saving of the soul” (v. 39). Note the distinction between those who believe to the saving of the soul and those who draw back to perdition.

Since the writer’s audience is composed of both believers and unbelievers, it should not surprise us that even in a law section we can find grace encouragement: “But recall the former days”(v. 32) and “do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward” (v. 35).

From this passage we can see how to distinguish statements of law from principles of grace because, while both make demands, the one terrifies while the other encourages.

Using this framework of law, gospel, and grace will enable you to correctly interpret and understand Scripture passages.

Purchase Your Copy of Law & Grace

In 2011 Regular Baptist Books, a division of Regular Baptist Press in Schaumburg, Illinois, released Law & Grace, Dr. Myron Houghton’s book that explains in detail the concepts in this Faith Pulpit article. As stated on the back cover of the book, “Law & Grace explores a core theological subject from several perspectives. After discussing how Law, Gospel, and Grace are viewed in Roman Catholic and Reformed theology, Myron Houghton uses an exposition of Romans to distinguish key theological concepts from a dispensational and Baptist viewpoint. Pastors, church leaders, and ministry students will appreciate the author’s thorough exegesis and practical applications, including advice on tithing, Sabbath-keeping, and the believer’s responsibility to follow grace principles for godly living.”

Purchase your copy of Law and Grace by visiting the Faith Bookstore at fbcbbooks.com or by calling 1-800-352-0146.

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Myron Houghton (Ph.D., Th.D.) began his ministry in 1971 at Denver Baptist Bible College as head of the Theology Department and joined the faculty at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in 1983 when the two schools merged. He retired from FBTS in May 2019 after nearly 50 years of teaching.

Dr. Houghton was promoted to Heaven on July 13, 2020, leaving a legacy of service and faithfulness to the thousands of men and women who he impacted during his ministry.