

Halloween warning!



I am sure that most of us are aware of the appalling spate of murders recently - especially where there have been farm murders. It can be no coincidence that these have occurred more frequently in the run up to Halloween. This time is a significant one on the calendar of those actively serving Satan - and one of the evil things that they do is to offer sacrifices to Satan in the form of animals and of humans.

DO NOT be drawn into any part of this incredibly evil celebration! It is not, and can not, be innocent or "fun"! No part of Halloween is suitable for any Disciple of Christ to be involved with in any way other than in prayer for the victory of Jesus Christ to be manifest. Let us pray that He defeats completely the purposes of the devil at this time. Each time you or I see any mention of Halloween, let us use it as a reminder to pray attentively into the situation...

For more information, go to Jericho Walls website - they have produced a very good information piece on this.



Let's spend a few minutes in prayer on this subject now.

Introduction:

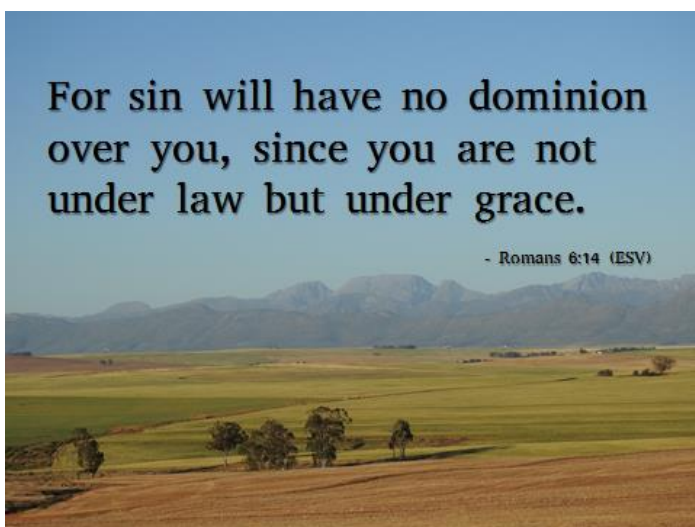
Please remember today that each of us is responsible before the Lord to discern EVERYTHING that we hear or read! If we are brutally honest, we will probably find that every error in the Church, and in the life of any Christian Disciple, may be traced back to the point at which the foundation was abandoned - and by the foundation I mean the Bible as read with the help of the Holy Spirit.

So each of you is responsible to examine what I say to you here today - I have done my best to listen carefully to what the Lord has to say on the subject matter, but you cannot simply receive it without careful discernment. Please do your own homework! And by that I mean that you should search the Scriptures (or Bible) for yourself...

We probably do not need to be reminded that we live in a time of great challenge to our Christian faith, and to the Church of Jesus Christ. One of those challenges is the fact that teachings that are not accurately based on Biblical revelation are promoted - and with our ability to access information almost instantly through social media and the internet, these teachings "go viral" (to coin a phrase) extremely quickly.

When the enemy cannot stop people from being saved through Jesus Christ, or from belonging to the Church, his strategy is often to inspire influential people within the Church to become obsessed with, or focussed on, a take on a Biblical principle that is a little bit off. And as we all know, "a little bit off" is not "on".

Now, to introduce today's topic, I would like you to discuss for a couple of minutes with the people around you the verse that appears on the screen - what does the writer mean by "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace"?



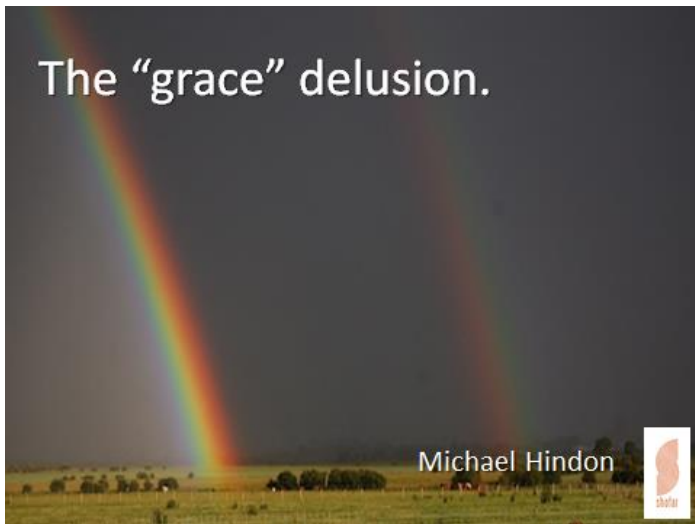
What do you think that the Apostle Paul means?

What does he mean by the law?

What about grace?

Do you think that law and grace are in opposition to one another? If so, why? If not, why?

I am not going to comment on the answers now - the exercise was to help each of us to try to understand what we believe this verse means. So now that we know what we believe, let us test that against what the Bible says.




You may notice that in my title I have placed the word "grace" within quotation marks because it is so often misused, or redefined to suit a purpose, outside the real Scriptural meaning.

We are warned over and over again to be on our guard against wrong teaching. Here are a few examples of such warnings, where we can see that wrong teaching is most certainly not a new phenomenon.

Here is the Apostle Peter's warning:


The "grace" delusion

2 Peter 3:15-16 (NLT):
¹⁵And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved. This is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him - ¹⁶speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture. And this will result in their destruction.



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2 Peter 3:17-18 (NLT):
¹⁷You already know these things, dear friends. So be on guard; then you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people and lose your own secure footing. ¹⁸Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now and forever! Amen.



The Apostle Paul warns Timothy in both 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy:

The "grace" delusion

1 Timothy 6:20-21 (NLT):

Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. Avoid godless, foolish discussions with those who oppose you with their so-called knowledge. ²¹Some people have wandered from the faith by following such foolishness. May God's grace be with you all.

2 Timothy 1:13-14 (NLT):

Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me - a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.



Jude also warns us about these things - in this case, specifically about abusing the concept of the Lord's grace:

The "grace" delusion

Jude 3-4 (NLT):

Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people. ⁴I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvellous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.



So now let us read Romans 6:14 again - as it is so often quoted with regard to grace...

The "grace" delusion

Romans 6:14 (ESV):

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.



What does this mean? Unfortunately, many people who have not read this verse within (firstly) the context of the rest of Romans, and (secondly) the context of the rest of Scripture; have taught that it means that we no longer have to obey the principles of the law - by which they most often mean what we call the ten commandments. In other words, they take grace to mean that we have been given a licence to live as we please - without consequence. This, they will tell you, is because Jesus Christ died for ALL sin.

Tragically, for them, and for those whom they lead astray; they are wrong - as we will clearly see during the course of our brief study this morning!

My opinion on what the Apostle Paul means here is this: Law represents the old covenant, Grace the new covenant. Let me explain: Relationship with the Lord WAS governed by the Law (as given to Moses by the Lord) when the Old Covenant was initiated in the wilderness after the Israelites were taken out of Egypt by the Lord - but it is now (since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ about 2000 years ago) governed by a New Covenant of grace, as manifested through the person of Jesus Christ! That's it, so simple. Grace is a manifestation of the love of the Lord for mankind. That manifestation is seen through the life of Jesus Christ; particularly as He spent time on the earth.

So I think that before we carry on, it would be useful to define the word "grace" as it is used in the Bible - not as it may have been redefined by misuse. I referred to the Holman Treasury of key Bible words for the following description:

The "grace" delusion

Grace

Greek expression: charis
Pronunciation: KAHR eess
Strong's Number: 5485

The Greek word for "grace," charis, is equivalent to the Hebrew word hesed, which means "loving kindness" - a word frequently used by the psalmists to describe God's character. In the New Testament, the word charis usually means "divine favour" or "goodwill," but it also means "that which gives joy" and "that which is a free gift."

- Holman Treasury of key Bible words



The "grace" delusion

Grace is the gift of God. It is expressed in God's actions of extending mercy, loving-kindness, and salvation to people. Divine grace is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 17). God's grace manifested in Jesus Christ makes it possible for God to forgive sinners and to gather them in the church. During His ministry, Jesus repeatedly offered forgiveness to a great number of sinners and extended God's succour for a variety of desperate human needs.

- Holman Treasury of key Bible words



The "grace" delusion

Through teachings such as the father's forgiveness of the prodigal son and the search for the lost sheep, Jesus made it clear that He had come to seek and save those who were lost. But ultimately, it was His redemptive death on the cross which opened wide the gate of salvation for repentant sinners so that they have access to God's forgiving and restorative grace. This simple truth is formulated in the doctrine of "justification by faith through grace" (Rom. 3:23; Titus 3:7).

- Holman Treasury of key Bible words



The "grace" delusion

According to this teaching, God graciously provides life, through the death of Christ, to sinners who believe in Jesus. Jesus' substitutionary death for all people enables God to pronounce a verdict of "not guilty" on repentant sinners and to include them in His eternal purposes. God's grace manifested in Jesus also makes it possible for God to bestow undeserved benefits on believers. These benefits enrich our lives and unite us together in the church.

- Holman Treasury of key Bible words



The "grace" delusion

God's acceptance of believers on the basis of grace gives us a new status: we are children of God, members of the household of God, and can relate to Him as our heavenly Father (Gal. 4:4-6). God's disposition to exercise goodwill towards His creatures is another essential meaning of "grace" in the Bible. This favourable disposition of God finds its supreme expression in Jesus Christ. By its very definition, this grace is rendered fully accessible to all humans with no precondition other than a repentant desire to receive it (Titus 2:11-12).

- Holman Treasury of key Bible words



The "grace" delusion

The tragic alternative to receiving God's grace is to remain in hopeless alienation from God (Rom. 1:21). Therefore, let us accept God's gift of grace granted to us in Christ Jesus.

- Holman Treasury of key Bible words



There are a whole lot of things that the grace of the Lord is not - this slide has a brief list of some of the most common errors:

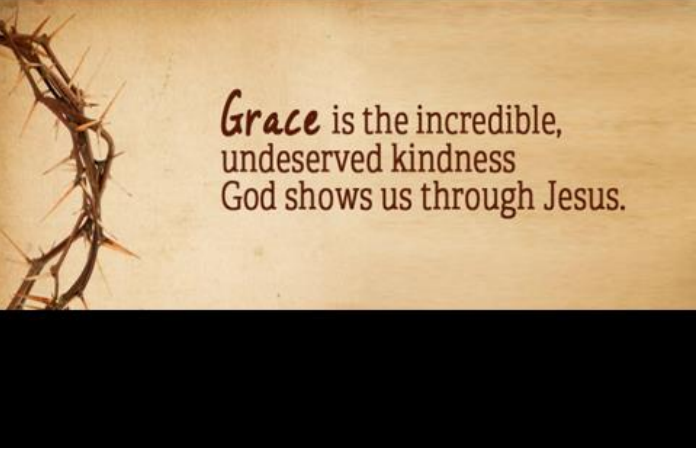
The "grace" delusion

What is grace not?

- Grace is not a licence for us to live as we please.
- Grace does not allow us to sin without consequences.
- Grace does not mean that ALL sin is dealt with in Jesus Christ – only that sin which is submitted to His process is.
- Grace does not mean that "all people go to heaven".
- Grace does not mean that Hell does not exist.
- Grace is not power.
- Grace does not redefine love.
- Grace is not another name for Jesus Christ.



While the statement on this slide is not a complete definition, it may be useful as an aid to help us to remember what the grace of the Lord really is:



Grace is the incredible,
undeserved kindness
God shows us through Jesus.

So now to confirm that the statements that we have just read are accurate, we will have a look at some Scripture verses.

As a matter of interest, I can find no mention of Jesus Christ speaking of grace at all in the Biblical record. In fact, the only place that the word grace is used in any of the four Gospels is in the Apostle John's introduction (John 1:6-18):

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John 1:6-11 (ESV):

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.



The "grace" delusion

John 1:12-15 (ESV):

¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.' ")



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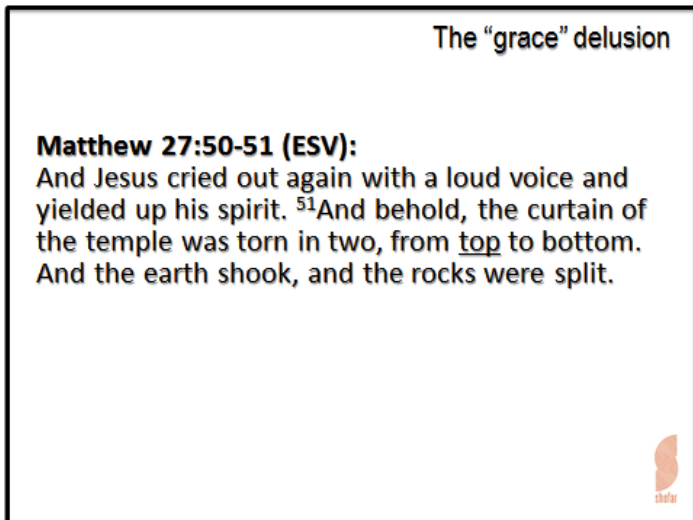
John 1:16-18 (ESV):

¹⁶For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.



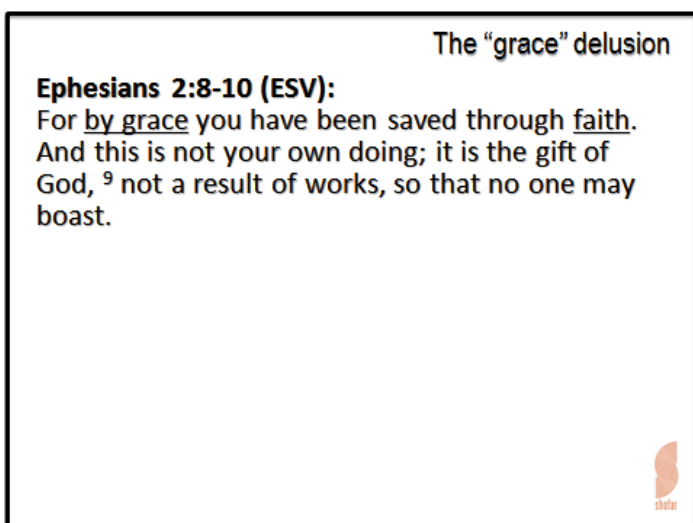
It is clear from this that grace came through Jesus Christ. It is also clear that this grace is exclusively available to those who receive and believe in Him. Those Jewish people who did not receive and believe in Him stayed under the Law. The trouble is, though, that the Law was superceded by Grace. The system (or covenant) of Law could not run simultaneously with the covenant of Grace!

There is a beautiful symbolism that clearly illustrates the end of the old covenant, and the beginning of the new, in the following verse:



The temple curtain was torn apart from TOP to bottom! It was an act of God - HE ripped it! The curtain enclosed the "holy of holies" within the Temple - which was where the presence of the Lord was supposed to dwell, and where the Jewish High Priest met with Him as a representative of the Jewish people - on their behalf. And now, suddenly, His place of dwelling was open to all!

Martin Luther, who was instrumental in the reformation of 500 years ago, was inspired by this statement of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians:




The grace of the Lord extends to us the means of salvation - the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ - but we need to receive the effect of this through faith; that is, by

believing, that Jesus Christ is Who He says that He is, and that what He did for us is exclusively effective in making a relationship with the Lord possible. There is NO other way! The old covenant (the Law) has been replaced - it does not, and can not, work any more.

The "grace" delusion

Matthew 5:17-19 (NLT):

"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. ¹⁹So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.




See, there is a distinction between the PRINCIPLES of the Law, and the COVENANT of the Law. The Lord is consistent - He never changes, this means that for us to enter into relationship with Him, we need to be holy.

Jesus warns us so clearly here:

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Luke 5:36-39 (NLT):

Then Jesus gave them this illustration: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and uses it to patch an old garment. For then the new garment would be ruined, and the new patch wouldn't even match the old garment. ³⁷"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the new wine would burst the wineskins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. ³⁸New wine must be stored in new wineskins. ³⁹But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the new wine. 'The old is just fine,' they say."



We cannot add the covenant of Grace to the covenant of the Law, but neither can we add the covenant of the Law to that of Grace.

We'll read what the writer to the Hebrews says...

The "grace" delusion

Hebrews 8:10 (NLT):

But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.



Why would the Lord, in terms of His new covenant, put His laws on our hearts, and write them on our minds - unless it is that we need to know what they are?

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Hebrews 10:8-12 (NLT):

When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law),⁹ then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second.¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,



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Hebrews 10:13-18 (NLT):

¹³waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,¹⁶ "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,"¹⁷ then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.



The "grace" delusion

Hebrews 10:19-22 (NLT):

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus.²⁰ By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place.²¹ And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house,²² let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.



To forgive means to write off - think of a debt.

The "grace" delusion

Romans 5:1-2 (NLT):

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. ²Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.



The "grace" delusion

Romans 5:3-5 (NLT):

³We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.



Now let's have a look at the immediate context for the verse that we started with in Romans:

The "grace" delusion

Romans 6:12-15 (NLT):

Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. ¹³Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. ¹⁴Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace. ¹⁵Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not!



The "grace" delusion

Romans 6:16-18 (NLT):

¹⁶Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. ¹⁷Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. ¹⁸Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.



Grace is NOT a licence to sin! The grace of the Lord that has become available to us through the new and living way of Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to receive the gift of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Who equips, leads, and guides us in the way that we should live so that we become sanctified (or are made holy).

The "grace" delusion

Mark 13:13, 37b (NET Bible):

But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

What I say to you I say to everyone: Stay alert!



Every one of us needs to guard against being led astray - against delusion or deception. Let us stay alert, and endure in searching the Scriptures whenever we are unsure of anything to do with our walk with the Lord.


The "grace" delusion

Luke 7:47 (NET Bible):

Therefore I tell you, her sins, which were many, are forgiven, thus she loved much; but the one who is forgiven little loves little."

1 John 3:3-6 (NLT):


And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. ⁴If someone claims, "I know God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. ⁵But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. ⁶Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.



Conclusion:

The "grace" delusion

What is grace not?

- Grace is not a licence for us to live as we please.
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The "grace" delusion

2 Timothy 1:9-10 (NLT):

For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time - to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. ¹⁰And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Saviour. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News.

