

The Psalms and Proverbs in Light of Grace

From: **Know and Believe:**

A Lifetime Journey toward Rediscovering God's Love for You

Taken from Chapter 6: The Prophets, Gospels, Psalms, and Proverbs
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Who, What, When, Where, and Why?

For many years, when reading the Bible, we asked ourselves, "How does this apply to me?" We wanted to get every ounce of truth from each passage so that we could better please and obey God. Having a better understanding of Bible interpretation, we now realize the question we *should* have been asking ourselves was, "**Does** this apply to me?"

Think about it. Every verse of the Bible has a context. It is important to know what the context is before we can apply it personally or not. It is improper to assume that what God spoke to the nation of Israel applies to another nation, for example.

This is also true of the Gospels. Jesus was sent to minister to the Jews who were under the law, and much of what He said was directed toward them (Gal. 4:4, Mk. 1:44). Some of His teachings were general truths which could be applied to either covenant (Mt. 5:3). Other things spoke of that which was to come (Jn. 14:17). He also prophesied of judgments both immediate and eventual (Mt. 24). When we understand this, it is much easier to understand the gospels.

Would we tell someone healed of leprosy today in our churches to see the priests so that they could go through the necessary ceremonies of cleansing (Lev. 13-14)? Would we tell someone that to be perfect and have treasures in heaven, he needed to sell all he had and give it to the poor (Matt. 19:21)? Is that our message to the lost (Rom. 10:9-10)?

Every action of Jesus and every teaching He gave, including the parables, need to be examined in context, and the question we *should* ask is, "DOES this apply to me under the New Covenant?" In some passages the answer will be yes, and in others, no.

If we don't do this, we will fall into the age-old trap of not recognizing that God deals differently with us under grace than He did with those who were under law. Here is a most notable example.

Isaiah 59:1-2

*Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened,
That it cannot save;
Nor His ear heavy,
That it cannot hear.*

²But your iniquities have separated you from your God;

*And your sins have hidden His face from you,
So that He will not hear.*

We can see two general truths about God in verse 1. He can hear, and He can save. That is true in any covenant. However, verse two, while true under the Law, is not true under grace. To whom was He speaking? It was to the Israelites who were guilty of the accusations that follow in the rest of the chapter. The law promised a curse for those who did not follow it, which involved God not hearing them.

Fellow believers in Jesus, your sins have been *forever* forgiven (Heb.10:14). He is *not* holding your sins against you (2 Cor. 5:19, Rom. 4:8). Your sins are continually forgiven (1 Jn. 1:7). He has promised to *never* leave you or forsake you for any reason ever (Heb. 13:5).

Let us be thankful that we are under His New Covenant of grace and faith. When we fail, we need not fear or believe that He is hiding His face from us; rather, we may rejoice that He not only forgives us, but is right here with us encouraging us and even working for good the mess we may have made.

Didn't God love the erring Israelites? Yes, absolutely. Yet, He dealt with them as He promised He would. The purpose of the law was to bring the promised Messiah to save the world precisely because He loved the world so much.

Great Things He Has Done

When considering the Proverbs, we think of wisdom, and the Psalms bring us great encouragement and peace. For years, the Psalms were a place of refuge when it looked as if my life would crumble into pieces, and the Proverbs instructed me again and again. How blessed we are to have them!

Until my thirties, I meditated upon them, sang them, prayed them, and applied them to my life. Never once in those years did I ever question this practice. When I began to understand the gospel of the grace of God and the difference between the Old and New Covenant (Acts 20:24, Heb. 8:13), I learned that I was not under law but grace (Rom. 6:14).

This gradual revelation came softly yet greatly challenged my long-held beliefs—not just beliefs, but the things that I'd treasured for so long which had comforted me. While singing a song based on a Psalm, something inside of my spirit would feel uneasy at the words coming out of my mouth. Here is a prime example of a Psalm that is commonly sung in worship services.

Psalm 51:10-12

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

(He's done that already.)

And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

(He's promised to do this continually.)

¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your presence,

(He promised to never ever leave us, not ever!)

And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

(The Holy Spirit abides in us forever.)

¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.

(He's done that also.)

This is NOT to suggest that the Psalms and Proverbs are irrelevant, only that it is important that we understand them in context (as we should all Scripture). These were written by those who looked ahead to the coming of Christ. They did not know His indwelling presence and forever forgiveness as we do. They didn't have the promises fulfilled as we do.

✎**They could only long for what we already have.**✎

So, it is perfectly wonderful to read the Psalms and Proverbs and enjoy them as long as we keep their context in mind, which includes who wrote them and under what covenant.

However, there is no error to be found in expressing similar sentiments apart from the original text that reflect the New Covenant of grace. We have found that many of the Psalms can “work” for us if we simply put them in the present or past tense instead of expressing them as a plea. Here is an example.

Psalms 51:10-12 (New Covenant adaptation)

You have created in me a clean heart, oh God,

And renewed a right spirit in me.

You have promised to never leave me or forsake me

And Your Spirit abides with me forever.

You have restored to me the joy of my salvation.

How I praise Your name for what You have done!

Hopefully, you can see the difference. In the original Psalm, we can hear the heart of the author longing for God, pleading with Him to never leave. When we change it to match our covenant, we can feel the joy and rest of knowing He never will.

The point of demonstrating this truth directly applies to how we read the Psalms and Proverbs as those under the New Covenant. The Jews LOVED the law of God. Unlike us, they were taught by it, led by it, and blessed and cursed by it. It is of extreme importance that we keep this in mind: we are not under the law. The very first Psalm gives us a prime example of the view they had of the law and its importance in their lives.

Psalm 1:1-3

Blessed is the man

*Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;*

² ***But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.***

³ *He shall be like a tree*

*Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.*

The above verses were an encouragement to the Jews to make the law of the Lord their priority. In doing so, they could expect strength, fruitfulness, health, and prosperity unlike the ungodly and sinners (those who did not follow the law). It's such a beautiful sentiment, though. Why can't we also enjoy it? Consider this New Covenant rendition.

Psalm 1:1-3 (New Covenant adaptation)

Blessed is the man

Who walks by grace through faith

² ***His delight is in **the grace** of the LORD,
And in **His grace** he meditates day and night.***

³ *He shall be like a tree*

*Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.*

This has everything to do with the love of God. If we read the Psalms and Proverbs and inappropriately apply the words to our lives, we will begin to see God's love and blessings as *conditional* on our behavior. We might unnecessarily adopt the emptiness they felt and the distance that separated them from His presence, which we now enjoy. However, when we understand the difference between living by grace through faith instead of by law through works, we are set free.

How miserable and confused we can become when we don't understand that law and grace ARE INCOMPATIBLE. When living under law, it seems that God loves you one day because you prayed and read the Bible and didn't sin, and the next day, His love and blessings for you are diminished because you didn't pray and read the Bible and you sinned (if

only an imperfect thought or unkind word). When living under grace, we are truly free from sin and alive unto God.

God is not human, of course, but perhaps you've had a relationship in which it seemed you were loved IF you did what was expected, BUT if you made one mistake, the love was recoiled or at least set aside until you conformed. In fact, in relationships such as that, we never truly feel loved unconditionally, if at all.

My friends, that is not what God's love for us is like. He is not holding our sins against us. He is not withdrawing His love if we make a mistake in word or deed. He isn't turning His back on us until we "get right" with Him. He isn't mad at us. He is FOR us, not against us. There is no condemnation, no accusations, no separation, and no damnation for those who are in Him (Rom. 8). He causes all things, yes, even our sins, to work together for our good. That is amazing grace and love in the extreme.¹

*Oh, how I love Your grace!
It is my meditation all the day.²*

Psalms 119:97 (New Covenant adaptation)

¹ "Shall we sin so that grace may abound? God forbid!"

² Original Verse: Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.