



Bookends to the Bible

The best defense is a good offense.

Carl von Clausewitz 1780 - 1831

Each of us, in life, is either taking the offensive (developing and exercising positive and effective disciplines) or we are necessarily, by default, constantly on the defensive. An effective offense is necessary to win since the best defense can, at most, hope for a draw. We do not need to neglect the defensive – it is important, but the best defense is a good offense; and for a Christian, the best offense (and, in the process, the best defense) is a working knowledge of the *Bible*. It is what the devil fears most, it is the most common means by which God speaks to people, it is without error, a sure “Word”. . . the *Bible* is vital to the Christian life – it is a primary means of “growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” ^{2Pe 3:18}

The *Bible* is a unique book, not because it is a religious book (there are many of these), but in the way it was written and compiled. It was written by about 40 people. The first portion (*The Old Testament*) was written over about a thousand years. Nothing was added for the next 500 years, then *The New Testament* was written in less than 100 years and in the 2,000 since nothing has been added or taken from it.

A single author can craft a fairly interesting and compelling religious fairy tale – in the same way any novel is written; if well-written it should be without contradiction, have a consistent theme, etc. – this is not a task beyond the capabilities of a good writer. But is not an easy task to compile a book written by many different people, over 1,500 – 1,600 years, and expect it to be of any interest or value 2,000 years later! Yet, the *Bible* has no credible critics claiming error or inconsistencies – amazingly it fits together like a perfect puzzle or picture. It is more timely than today’s newspaper or TV newscast. More people, by far, benefit from it than from all the Psychologists and Phyciatrists combined.

That said, it is still hard, if not impossible, to understand any subject or book without understanding its themes – the *Bible* is no different. *Genesis* and *Revelation* are placed at the beginning and end of the *Bible* because they are the books most clearly displaying God’s sovereignty, the foundational “macro” theme of the *Bible*. God created and will recreate a new and final heaven and earth; without accepting God’s sovereignty (His ability to do anything He wants), we will not understand the rest of the *Bible* (as we see with many supposed religious experts who deny this truth). The *Bible* starts with a great mental and faith challenge (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” ^{Ge 1:1}) as a foundation, as a demonstration, of His sovereignty; believe “In the beginning God created . . .” and

having personal faith that maybe He can and will protect me now and forever is possible; not believing this, not trusting that God is sovereign, will result in little of no faith in Him.

G O D' S S O V E R E I G N I T Y	F A I T H	G O D' S G R A C E
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If God's sovereignty is the "macro" subject of the Bible, Grace is certainly the micro theme – that which most applies to us personally. Sovereignty shows God's broad shoulders while Grace reveals the Surgeon's hands – God's personal interest in us individually. *Galatians* and *James* best provide the bookends of Grace.

And in the same way that *Genesis* and *Revelation* are bookends to the theme of God's Sovereignty and *James* and *Galatians* for God's Grace, Sovereignty and Grace are the bookends, the truths (and only truths), capable of building, protecting and upholding Faith.

Faith (real faith – measured by the power it carries and exhibits) requires we accept and act on the reality of God's Sovereignty and His Grace; mental acceptance is vital as is also our daily seeking to find and do the will of God.

Few false religions believe in God's Sovereignty while ALL false religions deny or badly distort His Grace.

Times of broad and pervasive "religions" (as we have, today, in America) are dangerous because they, historically, have been the times of greatest error just as we are warned:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days . . . having a form of godliness but denying its power.

2Ti 3:1-5

In these times, "Christianity" (like other religions), becomes weak, fainthearted, ineffectual and theoretical – a subject to be discussed, but not having any real impact on a person's life.

James and *Galatians* hold the truth of Grace in-place:

- ✚ *Galatians* warns against thinking that fulfilling the law (being nice, "good" . . . is the essence of Christianity – it is not!).
- ✚ On the other hand, *James* warns that "faith without deeds is useless and dead."

Galatians—maybe Paul's sharpest rebuke for "so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion . . . false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves . . . You foolish Galatians! . . . Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good . . . you have fallen away from grace . . . You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? . . .

"a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ . . . by observing the law no one will be justified . . . For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God . . . I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! . . . Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? . . . What then was the purpose of the law? . . . the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ . . . The entire law is summed up in a single command, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen . . .

"The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me . . . Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us . . . that we might receive the full rights of sons . . . It is for freedom that Christ has set us free . . .

"He redeemed us . . . so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit . . . the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father' . . . live by the Spirit . . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

In **James** we hear echoes of John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul as they tell us:

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance . . . Every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire . . . For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works . . . so faith without deeds is dead.

"Blessed is that man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life . . . Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says . . . the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this . . . will be blessed in what he does . . .

"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom . . . Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God."

So, the message of the *Bible* is not "find the middle ground between faith and works," rather it is an entirely new law of faith and the works that come from this faith, true faith (by, and only by, Grace).

"The righteous will live by faith." Hab 2:4 Romans 1:17

The opposite of not doing anything, seeing grace as passive, is thinking that fulfilling the law, being good, is the answer – neither is right. Both the *Old* and *New Testaments* are clear, grace is God's power given to us to do what is right and hard, not to keep us from the hard and right! Grace is not easy nor even hard, it is impossible – the only proof of its reality.

James and *Galatians* are both short books – James to keep us from the current fad (fads are cyclical) of thinking of grace as lawlessness – Galatians so that grace does not become legalistic; which is not the current fad (we rejected legalism a long time ago).

It is very common and tempting to be passive about and in life, hoping it won't deal us too bad a hand. Victims – we are all poor victims. The most the best defense can hope for is a draw – not success, just getting by with the least pain.

In these, our, times, *James/Galatians* are either very scary or very comforting books – comforting if we believe God is sovereign and we are not – scary if we believe everything important depends on us – how we "perform."

Faith is a blessing of Grace, and not achieved by hard work; but in faith there will be hard work. *James* and *Galatians* (and *Ephesians*) expose the most common traps for faith – telling us how to find it, how it is not found and what it looks like. Looking for hope and help? Life is not easy. It takes Grace (so says *Galatians*) and hard work (*James*) to make heads or tails of life – like it or not, the *Bible* is the only game in town in this effort!

In addition to understanding themes, it is important we understand how these themes fit together - their order and relative importance - *Galatians* and *James* help in this regard as well. *Galatians* leads to salvation while *James* is important to understand what comes after true salvation; The Law and Works are important, but they can, if misused, be deadly.

Jesus reiterates the importance of The Law. *Galatians*, as some suppose, does not denigrate The Law, rather it places it in its proper perspective – "The law as put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith" – as is supported by the verse from *Romans* below. In other words, we try to follow the law, find we fail and this humbles us to seek God's grace to do what we cannot ourselves do.

The Law	Salvation	Works
<p>“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Mt 5:17 - 19</p>	<p>As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph 2:1 -10</p>	<p>All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. Isa 64:6</p> <p>Isaiah is speaking here about those acts, works, people do to try to "earn" God’s favor - they are worse they useless – they are offensive to God.</p>
<p>Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. Gal 3:21</p>		<p>But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. Jas 2:18 - 19</p>
<p>So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Gal 3:24</p>		<p>You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. Jas 2:20 - 22</p>
<p>Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. Gal 3:25</p>		<p>As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead Jas 2:26</p>
<p>Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. Ro 3:19 - 20</p>		

If you really want to begin understanding Grace – read its 3 great (all short) books – *Ephesians*, *Galatians* and *James*.