

Governed By Grace

Delivered From the Kingdom of Sin – Part IV

Romans 6:14

Introduction – Not Under Law, But Under Grace

We arrive, in our study of Paul's letter to the Romans, at what has become one of his most controversial statements in all of the New Testament. In Romans, chapter 6, verse 14b, Paul says,

... you are not under law, but you are under grace.

That little phrase has divided more believers, split more churches, and created more anger, confusion, and opinion within the church than perhaps any other phrase. And the tragedy is that Paul intended it to be a summary statement of joy and praise.

"You are not under law . . ." in the Greek is "You are not 'hupo nomos' . . .". The Greek word "hupo" means, "to be controlled by; in subjection to". In other words, Paul is saying that the believer is no longer under the dominion and control of law, but under the dominion and controlling influence of grace. The believer has left the kingdom of spiritual fear for a kingdom of spiritual freedom.

Saying that is enough to start a revolution! Does that mean that we throw law aside? Does that mean that every man can do whatever he wants to do as long as he can claim "grace" as his motive and support?

I believe that correctly interpreting this phrase is so important that to err means to distort every aspect of life and to get it right means to restore and inspire every aspect of life. Paul is saying several things. Let us look at them.

We are not under the law's demands for God's approval

1. First, we are not under the law's demands for God's approval.

In other words, salvation is by the grace of God, in spite of the fact that we are all lawbreakers. Look at Romans, chapter 5, verse 8a..

... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Skip to verses 10 and 11.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

We are not under the penalty of law

2. Secondly, Paul is saying that we are not under the penalty of law.

Look at Romans, chapter 6, verse 23a.

... the wages of sin ...

(that is, the penalty for having broken the law),

... is death

We are not under the dynamic of law, but the dynamic of grace

3. Thirdly, we are not under the dynamic of law, but the dynamic of grace.

While we live within the law, we are not motivated by the law. In other words, while we are law abiding citizens, we find the guiding principle and

motivation of our holy living in the dynamic of God's redeeming grace.

One Jewish commentator that I enjoy reading, wrote that Paul does not include the definite article before the word "law". He does not say, "for you are not under *the* law," but simply, "for you are not under law." Therefore, Paul is referring to legalism, which is defined as, "a perversion of the Law into a system of rules for earning God's praise without trusting, loving, or communing with God, the Giver of the Law."ⁱ

I believe that he has a point. Paul has been contrasting the effort of religious mankind to find favor with God, but failing miserably, with salvation by faith through the grace of God. Salvation is not given to those who can perfectly keep a list of rules, it is given to those who have a relationship with the Redeemer, by faith through grace.

That is what Jesus Christ meant when He said to His first century Jewish audience, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 11, "Are you tired . . . are you weary . . . are you heavy laden, or burdened down? Come to Me and I will give you rest!"

What was He referring to? A nap? No. He is referring to a release from the tiring, burdensome effort of flesh to keep all of the observances and to not keep all of the prohibitions. "Come to Me," Jesus said, "My salvation is free; My yoke is light and easy."

Salvation is not what you can do for God, it is what God has already done for you.

Grace In Contrast to Law

Let me contrast legalism and grace, based on the twenty-first century.

Without a doubt one of the biggest challenges facing the believer is living in the extremes. Legalism on one side of the spectrum and licentiousness on the other.

Legalism is the belief that keeping a list of do's and don'ts will produce spirituality. Licentiousness is simply throwing away a list and not having any standards or convictions at all.

Both extremes are dead wrong! And more than that, they are dangerous.

Let me contrast legalism and grace, so that we can better grasp what Paul was encouraging us to celebrate about. Look at Romans, chapter 6, verse 14b again.

. . . you are not under [the principle of] law, but under [the principle of] grace.

There are four things that contrast law with grace. Let me give them to you.

The standard of law is external; the standard of grace is internal

1. First, the standard of law is external; the standard of grace is internal.

Law is only interested in outward compliance. Grace is more interested in inward character.

Law does an excellent job of pointing out a failure to keep it, but it cannot empower you to keep it.

I have never had a State Highway Patrolman stop me and say, "Listen, Sir, I just wanted to commend you for coming to a complete stop at those stop signs that have recently been put up in your neighborhood that, between you and me, are absolutely ridiculous. Thank you, Sir!"

I have never been pulled over and heard an officer say, "Listen, Sir, I noticed you were keeping the speed limit, even when you were going down that steep hill, and I wanted to pull you over and give you these gift certificates to the mall. Have a nice day."

No, that is not the role of law. Law stops you when you exceed the speed limit, and it does not give you a gift certificate, but gives you what you deserve, which is a summons that immediately causes you to sweat over just how high your auto insurance rates are going to go up.

Law deals with external compliance. That is the role of law, and the more obedient we are to law, the more orderly our society will become.

Living under the dynamic of grace however, is a matter of the heart. It is an internal issue that may never be picked up on radar.

You can keep the speed limit and be an ungodly man. You can stop at all the stop signs, hold the door for women, chew with your mouth closed, clock in at eight in the morning, do your job and follow orders and yet, be absolutely pagan in your heart. And everyone will sing, "For he's a jolly good fellow."

The principle of grace starts on the inside, where no one but God sees. You discover that you cannot be governed by grace and live in sin.

Paul wrote in Titus, chapter 2, verses 11 and 12,

. . . the grace of God has appeared, bringing [two things] salvation to all men [and] instructing us to deny ungodliness and

worldly desires and to live . . . godly in the present age

By the way, this struggle between the principle of legalism and the principle of grace is not new. Controversy and confusion related to the Christian life and walk, began to surface almost before the clouds covered the place where Jesus Christ ascended.

One church father, writing in the second century to a younger believer on how to live a godly life, recorded these words,

Forsake colored clothing . . . remove everything in your wardrobe that is not white; no longer sleep on a soft pillow and take warm baths; if you are sincere about following Christ, never shave your beard, for to shave is an attempt to improve on the work of Him who created us.

Legalism always majors on the minors; it always exaggerates the non-essential stuff of life.

The standard for legalism is external compliance; the standard for grace is internal character.

The foundation of legalism is rules; the foundation of grace is relationship

2. Secondly, since the standard is external, it would follow that the foundation of legalism would be rules, while the foundation of grace is relationship.

In others words, legalism is interested in what people do; grace is interested in who people are.

Paul has made it clear in Romans, chapter 6, who we are. We are people who are eternally related by faith to Jesus Christ. We are in Him at His death, His burial, and His resurrection, as we are told in Romans, chapter 6, verses 3 through 5. And Paul says, in verse 11,

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Legalism and its multiplied religions is a system of rules; Christianity is a relationship. One of the reasons Paul wanted us to celebrate the truth of grace was the fact that God related to us as believers in Christ, through grace.

Have you ever thought about the fact that the throne of God is often referred to as the “throne of grace”? That means that every command emanating from God’s throne is wrapped with grace. That means that you can approach His throne with boldness,

knowing who you are in Christ; knowing that God will relate to you in grace.

As we become more like Him, we also will relate to other people through the principle of grace. Just as we do not stand in grace before God because we deserve it, we do not act toward others with grace because they deserve it.

However, let us face the fact that there is something comfortable about relating to people based on things we can easily compare to or observe.

There is something really comfortable about reducing Christianity to a list of do’s and don’ts. You always know where you stand. It eliminates anxiety about what to do and what not to do. However, it also eliminates wisdom! You do not have to pray either. You just keep the rules.

Ladies and gentlemen, Christianity is not a list, but a life.

Grace will instruct you in holiness; grace will encourage you when you fail; grace will demand your utmost diligence and discipline; grace will remind you that there is a day approaching when every motive will be explored and every idle word and sinful thought exposed, and rewards will be dispensed from that throne of grace for that which we have accomplished that has been profitable for His glory.

You might say, “Okay, a list of rules may not produce or even reveal true holiness and purity. So then, what are the guidelines?”

Guidelines for living a holy and pure life

Let me give six guidelines for living a holy and pure life.

If the scriptures warn against it, do not play around with it

- If the scriptures warn against it, do not play around with it.

Paul wrote, in I Corinthians, chapter 7, verse 1b, . . . *it is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

The context of this verse implies that this is a woman who is not the man’s wife. Just how far are you going to play around with that one?

Paul also wrote, in Ephesians, chapter 4, to put away lying and greed. How much of that are you going to play with, rather than refuse.

If the scriptures forbid it, do not try to justify it

- If the scriptures forbid it, do not try to justify it.

Be careful if you hear yourself justify something that is questionable or perhaps even sinful with the words, “Well, I’m under grace.”

Being under grace does not mean that grace will cover impurity, a lack of discipline, a tolerance of greed, anger, or lust. Remember the beginning of this chapter of Romans, which says, “Are we to continue in sin so grace may increase? May it never be!”

If the scriptures do not say anything about it, do not assume it is right or wrong

- If the scriptures do not say anything about it, do not assume it is right or wrong.

The Bible does not say anything about a lot of things. Grace means that you have a relationship with Jesus Christ and just maybe He wants you pursue Him for wisdom and find the best things to do, as well as the wrong things to avoid.

If the scriptures are truly silent about it, do not try to use it to prove your point

- If the scriptures are truly silent about it, do not try to use it to prove your point.

Over the years, I have received criticism through a number of different channels about a number of different things. Some of them were written on visitor’s cards; some were emailed; others were sent through anonymous mail. I have never seen a verse attached, but some pretty strong feelings were noted. I have received disapproval for:

- not wearing a robe when I preach;
- not reciting the Lord’s prayer at some point in our service;
- not giving a traditional altar call;
- not holding worship services on Sunday night;
- not crossing myself before and after praying;
- not having a steeple and a cross on top of our building;
- allowing drums on stage;
- singing choruses that were written within the last twenty-five years;

- singing choruses accompanied by guitars;
- having too many choruses in worship services;
- having too many hymns in worship services;
- having guest speakers who were not Independent Baptists;
- not printing an order of service;
- not preceding the service with a prelude and not concluding the service with the Doxology;
- reading scripture during the worship services (I was accused on that account of being too Catholic, in that I was forcing people to read scripture, but later in the same time period, I was called anti-Catholic because of some theological point I had made in opposition to the Roman Catholic church. So, in the space of a few months, I was both pro-Catholic and anti-Catholic.).

No verses came attached to these criticisms, which is good, because, if the scriptures are silent about it, do not use it to prove your point.

If the scriptures encourage it, do not try to ignore it

- If the scriptures encourage it, do not try to ignore it.

If the scriptures teach it, do not try to live without it

- If the scriptures teach it, do not try to live without it.

We will cover this issue more thoroughly when we arrive at Romans, chapter 14, where Paul gives principles regarding preferences and convictions.

Thus far we have learned that:

- the standard for legalism is external; while the standard for grace is internal;
- the foundation for legalism is rules; the foundation for grace is a relationship.

The objective of legalism is conformity; the objective of grace is transformation

3. Thirdly, the objective of legalism is conformity; the objective of grace is transformation.

A person who practices legalism finds great comfort in the fact that other people do the same things they do or do not do. The truth is, we all have a little of that within us. It began to show up very early in our teen years, or before, in something we referred to as “peer pressure.” Legalism is the ultimate form of peer pressure, because it attaches the name of God to it.

The trouble is, since legalism is interested in external activity, it is easy to conform without actually being transformed.

One author wrote,

Conforming to boundary markers too often substitutes for authentic transformation. The church I grew up in had its boundary markers. People could be proud, resentful, and gossip, but if they were caught smoking, they were told to leave. Smoking was a boundary marker. As I was growing up, having a “quiet time” became a boundary marker, a measure of spiritual growth. If someone had asked me about my spiritual life, I would immediately think, “Have I been having regular and lengthy quiet time?” My initial thought was not, “Am I growing more loving toward God and toward other people?” Boundary markers change from culture to culture, but the dynamic remains the same. If Christians do not experience authentic transformation, then their Christianity will retreat within their boundary markers that masquerade as evidence of a changed life.ⁱⁱ

The objective of legalism is development of conformity; the objective of grace is the development of transformation.

Would you believe that in the third century there was an incredible controversy over the posture of public prayer? Some examples include:

- In A.D. 220, Tertullian, a well known church father, set down some guidelines for praying. He said if you lifted your hands toward heaven when you prayed, they did not need to be washed every time before prayer – since they were spiritually clean. Tertullian also believed it was wrong to sit when conversing with God in prayer. He taught as well, that

you should never kneel in prayer on Easter because that was the day when Christ arose.

- Another famous third century church father, Clement of Alexandria, believed you should pray with eyes open toward heaven.
- Other church fathers taught that prayer was most spiritual if you stretched out your arms horizontally in the cross position as you prayed, in order to mimic the crucified Christ.

All these views brought great confusion. To us they sound silly, but to those who lived at the end of the temple era when worship was mediated for them, but then began to relate to God directly, these were good questions. How do you approach God? Do you kneel? Do you fall prostrate? Do you hold your hands up? Do you wash your hands before praying or not? Do you close your eyes or open them?

The controversy on the posture of prayer raged for more than two generations. It ended when the Council of Nicea declared that congregational prayer in the church should be offered standing up.

In other words, the council itself missed the point. It promoted the principle of conformity rather than the principle of grace, which is transformation. A transformed heart can find any posture suitable for prayer. That may include open eyes, eyes watching a sunset, closed eyes, eyes blurred by tears, a seated position, a position flat on your face, or standing with hands lifted high.

To this day, the point is not how you pray, but that you pray.

There are more contrasts of grace and law, but I will only include one more.

The fruit of legalism is fear; the fruit of grace is fellowship

4. Fourthly, the fruit of legalism is fear; the fruit of grace is fellowship.

Mount Sinai did not bring liberty; it brought law. It could bring civility, but not saintliness. Another mountain would host that, which we call Mount Calvary.

The cross of Christ released us from the spirit of fear and gave to us the potential of adoption; that is, fellowship with the Father as legal sons and daughters of God. It also brought fellowship with one another through Christ.

Legalism brings fear which produces only greater guilt. Grace brings fellowship which produces only greater gratitude.

The inspiration for the Christian's obedience and holy living is not fear that God will zap him from heaven if he gets out of line, but gratitude for God who loved him and gave Himself for him, in the cross work of Jesus Christ.

I read, this past week, this evidence of grace in Matthew Henry's life. Paul states in I Thessalonians that grace produces gratitude. Matthew Henry, the famous Bible commentator in the early 1800's, wrote in his diary this interesting entry after being robbed earlier in the day,

Let me be thankful;

1st because I was never robbed before;

2nd because, although he took my money, he did not take my life;

3rd because, although he took all I possessed, it was not much;

and 4th because it was I who was robbed, and not I who robbed.ⁱⁱⁱ

This was written by a man who was transformed internally by the working of grace. In living such a life, he discovered the byproducts of grace. And, one of the chief byproducts is gratitude.

It is no wonder that Paul endured incredibly difficult things with joy and gratitude. This was his over-riding principle of life and it caused great celebration. He writes like no other could, in Romans, chapter 6, verse 14, "We are no longer bound and motivated by the principle of law; we are under the dynamic, the standard, the foundation, the fellowship, the governing principle of grace."

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/25/2003 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary (Clarksville, MA, Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 374.

ⁱⁱ John Ortberg, "True and False Transformation," Leadership, (Summer, 2002), p. 102.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tony Evans, Totally Saved (Moody Press, 2002), p. 139.