

Romans

Bible Study

Grace-Life

Romans 12:1—2

The first 11 chapters of Romans lays the groundwork for the believer, in this Dispensation of Grace, to live in accordance with grace. In order to properly live out the grace-driven life it is first necessary to understand what it is. It is especially beneficial to understand Israel's "Law-life."

This is why it is actually helpful to understand what the grace-life is not. Paul introduces the grace-life in contrast to the Law-life that Israel lived under. They were required to live according to the Law, which dictated how they should live and how they could please the Lord. The Law put people under bondage (Galatians 4:4—7) by amplifying sin (Romans 5:20; 7:13) and making them a slave to it (John 8:34). The Law was woven into every part of an Israelite's life. They could not live a day without the Law dictating what they needed to do. Just as we live with governmental laws and ordinances that define our lives, they lived under God's Law contained in the Mosaic Law.

Those who don't understand the difference between Law-living and Grace-living often combine the two into what is called legalism. They think that God is pleased when we put ourselves under a form of the Law. The law that most put themselves under is often a form of the Mosaic Law, but is usually twisted to fit into today's world. They redefine Sunday to be the Sabbath and will refuse to shop or work on Sunday. This can lead to thinking wearing a dress instead of pants, or not wearing makeup is pleasing to God (as a woman). Likewise, not having long hair, or tithing 10 percent, or attending church services, or abstaining from alcohol can be viewed as a way to earn some merit with God. People foolishly make up non-biblical ways of acting in order to please God. People are legalistic when they try to follow the Mosaic Law or when they make up their own "laws" in order to please God. The interesting thing is that if you believe you should do something (or not do something) and don't do it (or do it) then you are sinning (Romans 14:23, James 4:17). Those who live by legalistic means are often the ones guilty of judging others according to their own made up laws, which is a sin (Romans 14:13). This was the problem with the Galatians who were saved by Grace but desired to run back to the Law. Paul calls them foolish for thinking that the Law was better than Grace (Galatians 3:1—3). There are still believers today who think they need to live by the Law, and that the Law is God's grace. They would have to ignore such passages as Galatians 3:13 that calls the Law a curse, and that we have been redeemed from this curse by the cross. It is impossible to mix Law and Grace because if you have one, you can't have the other. Those who put them together don't understand either one. The Law had no grace to it, although the Law was to be applied with grace. The Law could be "broken" if there was a humanitarian need to do so. Grace is void of Law, other than the law of love (Romans 13:8).

While Israel was told to keep the commandments (Matthew 5:19; 19:17; Luke 1:6; John 14:21; 1 John 2:3), we in the Church, the Body of Christ, are told that we are not under Law, but under Grace (Romans 6:14; Galatians 2:21; 5:4), and that the Jews and Gentiles have been put on equal footing because the Law was taken out of the way (Ephesians 2:15). God has removed the ordinances that condemn us by nailing them to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Instead of living a life of dos and don'ts, we live a life of Grace in accordance to Paul's doctrine, which he presented in Romans 1—11. Christ is glorified in us when we live according to Grace, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and not according to Law, which we do in our own power (2 Thessalonians 1:12). Those who follow the teaching of the earthy Jesus are following the legalism of the Law (Romans 15:8). Those who live by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are attempting to please God under the Law instead of living according to Grace as Paul shows us in his 13 books. The foundational book of Romans is so important because it shows us exactly what is expected of us in this Dispensation of Grace. This doctrine establishes the believer (Romans 1:11).

The Grace-life

The grace-life is one that lives by Pauline doctrine (Romans 15:16). It is all about living a life pleasing to God without being in subjection to the Law (Romans 6:14). The Law only magnified sin, while Grace frees us from that bondage (Romans 8:15, 21; Galatians 2:4). The Grace-life is possible only by understanding what Paul teaches about how we should live in this Dispensation of Grace.

The Grace-life is about casting off the old nature and putting on the new nature. We do this by renewing our minds, changing our thinking from the old-nature point of view to the new-nature view point. It is training ourselves to stop thinking in our usual, natural way, and think how God wants us to think. The renewed mind can happen only when we, as believers, take in God's word and allow the Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out. It is about thinking from a whole different standpoint, and allowing God to mold and shape us with this new way of thinking. It is about immersing ourselves in good doctrine and being around people who encourage us to live properly.

There are three major passages of Scripture pertaining to operating under the renewed mind. The first is Romans 12:1—2. Chapter 12 begins with Paul pleading for us to give ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. The basis for doing this is found in the first 11 chapters of Romans. In light of all that God did for us, our "reasonable service" is to give ourselves completely back to Him. We do this, not by conforming to the way the world thinks, but by becoming transformed by renewing our minds and thinking the way God thinks. We are able to be in step with God's thinking because we have His word and we have the indwelling Holy Spirit. When we are walking in step with the Holy Spirit, we will naturally bear fruit for God (Galatians 5:16, 22—25).

The second passage that addresses our Grace life in Christ is Ephesians 4:17—24. As believers, we no longer live as we had before salvation. Those things should all be in the past, things that we turn away from by putting them aside and thinking and doing godly things. We put off the things of the old nature, which is corrupt and unable to do anything that is pleasing to God, and put on the new nature which was created in us, in the likeness of God's righteousness and holiness. The key to doing this is in the renewing of our mind. We were born with a mind that could only think old-nature thoughts. It could not comprehend anything spiritual because it was tainted by the fallen Adamic nature. After we were saved, it was then possible for us to put on the new nature by renewing our mind in Godly things. We fill our mind with His word and allow the Holy Spirit to work in us.

The third major passage dealing with our walk is found in Colossians 1:9—13. We need to fill ourselves with the knowledge of His word in order to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. This filling with God's word will renew our mind. When our mind is renewed, we will walk properly and bear fruit that is pleasing to God. We will bear this fruit in every good work, and when we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit everything we do will be a good work. When we fill ourselves with this knowledge, He gives us wisdom and spiritual understanding so that we will know how to apply our knowledge in every situation. Without proper knowledge, we will be unable to walk in a worthy manner. We will be ill equipped to serve Him.

Paul has given us everything we need to live the Grace-life. The rest of the book of Romans will give practical, every-day examples of applying this knowledge. This is where the rubber meets the road. It will do no good to learn about living according to godly principles if those principles are not put into action. The examples given by Paul in the next few chapters should act as a springboard for us to be able to use what we learned in our daily life. Explaining how to live the Grace-life is easy. Living the grace-life will take a lifetime filled with many detours and failures. Simple to explain but not easy to consistently live.

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