

Growing In The Grace Of God

The Law Of God

Romans 6:14 tells us how God has arranged for people to get out from under the domination of sin to establish a relationship with Him and to develop a life of fellowship and service with Him. "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." It is the grace of God at work on our behalf that sets us free from both the condemnation and the bondage of sin. Many of us have often behaved as if the law of God were designed to do such. This can easily happen if we do not heed what the scriptures have to say about the fundamental aspects of law and grace.

The Message of God's Law

The law of God can be summarized in two words, "be holy" (Leviticus 19:2 and 1 Peter 1:16). The standard of this holiness is the holy character of God. As Jesus clarified and intensified the message of the law in the Sermon on the Mount, He also summarized the law in two words, "be perfect" (Matthew 5:48). The standard of this perfection is the perfect character of God ("as your Father in heaven is perfect").

The Inability of God's Law

The law of God demands godly perfection. However, it is unable to provide what it demands, "for the law made nothing perfect" (Hebrews 7:19). God's law cannot bring us a perfect standing before God. The law cannot give us justification. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Galatians 2:16). Furthermore, God's law cannot bring about an increasing presence of godly perfection in our daily walk and spiritual growth. The law cannot give us what we need for the process of sanctification. "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). Perfection by the flesh speaks of trying to live up to the law by our own human efforts and resources. This is a foolish impossibility. This is the weakness or inability of the law. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son" (Romans 8:3).

The Ability of God's Law

Although the law of God cannot (and was never intended to) provide either justification or

sanctification, it is fully able to do what God intended for it to accomplish. Most obvious of all, it can reveal the character of God, as well as His will and His standards. Also, God's law makes all the world accountable to Him and gives us understanding concerning what sin is (Romans 3:19-20). Additionally, the law of God can speak a humbling and convicting word to the lawless and insubordinate, including carnal and rebellious believers (1 Timothy 1:8-9). Most important of all, the law points out to us our great need for Jesus Christ. "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ" (Galatians 3:24).

The Fulfillment of God's Law

Now the question is, how are the demands of the law fulfilled in us, both initially and continually? They are ultimately met in our lives by faith in Jesus Christ, who came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Jesus fulfills the law in a comprehensive sense. He fulfilled its perfect standards by the life He lived, never disobeying it at any time. He fulfilled its ultimate penalty by dying on the cross for all of us, who transgressed it repeatedly. He can fulfill it now increasingly within us, as we trust in His Spirit, thereby allowing Jesus to live His righteous life in and through us (Romans 8:4 and Galatians 2:20). To borrow an appropriate phrase that Paul used elsewhere, this is all "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Ephesians 1:6).

Justifying and Sanctifying Grace

Another way to state these truths is that God's grace must come to bear upon our lives both for justification and for sanctification. Every true believer has embraced the reality of God's justifying grace. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). However, many Christians have overlooked the actuality of God's sanctifying grace. "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up" (Acts 20:32). Being built up in the Lord has to do with sanctification, and it is accomplished by the grace of God revealed in His word. In many instances, the word of God relates the grace of God to the process of sanctification, the growth of the believer in godliness and service (see 2 Timothy 2:1; Titus 2:11-12; Hebrews 13:9).

Living Daily by the Grace of God

How do we live by God's grace? Does it mean that we do nothing but "float along in a spiritual hammock of passivity"?!?! Not at all! We become fully involved in living by grace. However, our involvement develops through ways and means that God has ordained, ways that man would never have imagined. Two matters in particular are strategic in living by grace: humility and faith.

Humility

"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). The grace of God does not flow into and through lives of self-sufficiency. Lives that depend upon their own resources and abilities are actually resisted by the Lord?! Humility admits our comprehensive need for God to work in our lives. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Faith

The other key factor is faith. Romans 5:2 speaks of Jesus Christ, "through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand." The spiritual ground upon which we stand in Christ is a realm of grace, abundant grace. "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace" (John 1:16). The issue then is how to access that grace, how to avail ourselves of it in every day Christian living. This is done by faith, by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, day by day and step by step. Every opportunity, every challenge, every decision - - everything is to be dealt with by faith. We are to live by dependence upon the Lord, counting on His word, His provisions, His promises, His work on our behalf, His grace operating on us and in us and through us.

Bearing Fruit

In line with all that we have considered thus far, the grace of God is available to and is able to develop fruitful lives unto the Lord. Colossians 1:6 refers to the gospel of God's grace, "which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth." It should be of no surprise that this spiritual process of fruit-bearing involves humility and faith. The need for each is powerfully stated in John 15:4-5. "The branch cannot bear fruit of itself . . . neither can you . . . without Me you can do nothing (nothing that amounts to spiritual fruit)." These are words that provoke humility within us before the Lord. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit." These are words that produce faith within us toward the Lord.

Good Works

One of the purposes that the Lord had in mind in making us new creatures in Christ was that we might serve Him with a life of good works. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). The grace of God is the resource we are to draw upon for developing this life of good works. When the first missionary team went out to establish the

church in new places, the work was accomplished by the dynamic of the grace of God. "From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed" (Acts 14:26). Paul eventually wrote that God's grace was the explanation of his entire life of abounding good works. "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Conclusion

The grace of God is abundantly available and absolutely able to shape our lives into all that the Lord desires. May we not receive it in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1), that is, accept it for less than God's intended purposes. May we not turn it into lewdness (Jude 4), that is, attempt to make it a self-serving license for indulging our flesh. Remember, we are "stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). So, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Then, day after day, until the Lord returns, we can "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen." (2 Peter 3:18)