

The Danger of Mixing Law and Grace

Heretofore, I have written extensively on the extraordinary depth and breadth of the atonement. What Christ accomplished for us on the cross opened the door for God's grace to become operative in our lives.

At Calvary, Christ paid the penalty for our past sin and terminated the law as a means of achieving righteousness. He settled Satan's claims against us, thus delivering us from Satan's dominion. Christ also put away sin, and in Him our carnal nature was executed.

To understand how this grace operates in our lives, we must examine the difference between law and **grace**. The apostle Paul gave us a key in 2 Corinthians 3 when he wrote: "Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God.

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

"For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious,

what remains is much more glorious. Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away” (vv. 3-13, NKJV).

Basically, the difference between the two covenants can be summarized in this statement: Law commands the old man from the outside; grace writes upon the heart of the new man from within.

Internal Transformation

Law is external; **grace** is internal. Law is outside me—something I can point to and say, “That’s what I’ve got to do.” Grace is inside me and changes me in such a way that it becomes natural for me to act the way God wants.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul sums it up this way: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

The veil Paul refers to that has been lifted from our faces is our carnal understanding, from which we are delivered through the cross (see Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; Gal. 5:24).

The “mirror” is God’s Word (James 1:23). When we look into this mirror with faith, the **Holy Spirit** reveals to us the glory of Christ and our inheritance in Him. As long as we continue looking in this way, the Holy Spirit progressively changes us into the likeness of what we see—“from glory to glory.” However, if we turn our eyes away from the mirror of the Word—to ourselves, perhaps, and our own ability—the Holy Spirit is no longer able to continue His transforming work.

By His **grace**, God desires to produce within us the kind of love that is not based on emotionalism or sentimentality. It is not expressed primarily by religious clichés or religious

activities. Rather, it is a way of life, affecting every relationship and situation in which we find ourselves.

To the Christians at Philippi, Paul wrote, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment" (Phil. 1:9). This love continually leads us on into a clearer and clearer perception of God's will for every detail of our lives.

There is always more to learn. As we see each detail revealed in the mirror of the Word, the Holy Spirit applies it and works it out experientially in our lives. Thus we are ever more and more closely conformed to the pattern of **Christ** Himself (see Rom. 8:29). All this is the result of a continuing inner work of the Holy Spirit, not an external religious system of rules and regulations.

Another passage that points out the difference between the old covenant of law and the new covenant of grace is Hebrews 8:10-12. This passage is actually a quotation from Jeremiah 31:33-34: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

"None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

In these verses, we see three ways in which the new covenant differs from the old: (1) The Holy Spirit writes the laws of God on our hearts and minds; (2) every believer can know God directly; and (3) by one final sufficient offering, the very memory of our sins is blotted out.

Grace is transmitted only by the working of the Holy Spirit, who writes **spiritual truths** on our hearts. We do not read

these with our eyes, but they are absorbed inwardly and thus redirect the way we live.

Outward Obedience

Grace operates in our lives by a continuing, **supernatural** operation of the Holy Spirit. Grace never works on the plane of our natural abilities. When we start to think we've got it made, that we can do it by ourselves, we are no longer operating in grace.

The distinction between the law and grace can also be illustrated as two alternative ways of making a journey across unfamiliar territory to an unknown destination. Law offers a map; grace provides a personal Guide, the Holy Spirit. "For as many as are led by the **Spirit of God**, these are sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

Imagine a traveler, who sets out on a journey and says, "Give me the map; I can make it on my own."

"All right," God replies. "Here's the map—correct and complete in every detail." Our traveler starts off with the map in his hand. Before long, it gets dark and cold, and he finds himself on the brink of a precipice. He has no idea whether he's facing north, south, east or west. He's miserable and lonely.

Finally, he cries out, "God, I need you."

In a moment the Holy Spirit is right there beside him, and He says, "Take My hand; I'll lead you." And soon the traveler is back on the highway.

The sun is shining, the birds are singing, and he begins to think it wasn't so bad after all; he could have made it on his own. So he turns to the **Holy Spirit** and says, "I started out with a good map, and I think if I just take a little time, I can find out where I am. If I know where I am on the map, I'll be able to make it." So he pulls out the map again and starts

poring over it.

“I see you no longer need Me,” the Holy Spirit gently says, but the traveler is too busy reading the map to hear Him. When he is finally finished with the map, he looks up again, but the Holy Spirit has withdrawn Himself. He is nowhere to be found.

That is the danger in the Christian walk. We acknowledge our need of the Holy Spirit, but when we begin to make good progress, we decide we can make it with the map. At that point, **grace** ceases to operate in our life. We have to make a choice—either the map or the Guide. One excludes the other. If it’s going to be the Guide, it has to be the Guide all the time, all the way. In this new life we are 100 percent dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

Total Dependence

The first eight chapters of the book of Romans expose the transition from dependence on the law to dependence on the Spirit. Chapter eight depicts the liberty and joy of the Spirit-filled life. The preceding seven chapters deal with various obstacles that we have to overcome on our way into this life.

The law is the last and greatest obstacle to overcome in order to experience the **Spirit-filled life** fully. Only when we have renounced legalism once and for all as a means of achieving righteousness can we enter into, and abide in, the Spirit-filled life of Romans 8.

In this matter of dependence upon the Holy Spirit, Jesus has left us the perfect pattern. He was totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit, not only in His earthly walk, but also in His death. Paul wrote: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

Christ was raised up by “the glory of the Father.” That is the Holy Spirit. This is brought out in the J.B. Phillips’ translation of Romans 1:4, where it states that Jesus was “marked out as the Son of God by the power of that Spirit of holiness which raised him to life again from the dead.” The “Spirit of holiness” is the Hebrew way of saying the Holy Spirit.

The lesson is this: Jesus did not raise Himself from the dead. He was totally dependent upon the Father to raise Him by the Spirit. And just as Jesus depended upon the Holy Spirit for the resurrection, so totally do we have to depend on the Holy Spirit for the ability to walk in this new life.

The law as a means of **righteousness** strengthens the basic motivation of sin—the desire to be independent of God. Grace does the opposite. It lays the only enduring foundation of righteousness—total dependence upon God. Grace operates in our lives only by the continuing, supernatural presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We are to live in total dependence upon Him every day, every hour, every moment.

Read a companion devotional.

Derek Prince (1915-2003) gained worldwide recognition as one of the most gifted Bible teachers of the 20th century. His simple yet thorough approach made his teaching equally relevant and helpful to people from all racial and religious backgrounds. Best-selling author Stephen Mansfield included new details from his life in the book *Derek Prince, A Biography: Father, Statesman, Teacher, and Leader* (Charisma House).