

REFINE US, Part 8

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If the Spirit has given us life, let us align ourselves with Him and let our conduct be controlled by Him. (Galatians 5:25)

Christians are said to live “under grace” instead of “under law.” This does not describe a change of *outcome* (as if the Law of God had been abandoned in favor of personal preferences), but a change of *motivation*, a fresh source of power for accomplishing what the Law and the Lord still require of us.

Under the Law, I was dependent on my flesh—my own knowledge, wisdom and strength—to achieve what was required of me.

Under grace, I am dependent on the Holy Spirit—His knowledge, wisdom, and strength—to achieve what He requires of me.

This concept is wonderfully described by Paul in his letter to the church in Rome (6:12-22). Listen carefully, as I read it for you (with some commentary sprinkled along the way):

Romans 6:12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires.

¹³ *Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin.*

[The words “do not” imply a choice, an option, a decision we may make. This ability is God’s gracious design at work in us—the power to choose, especially the power to choose to do what is right.]

Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life.

So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.

¹⁴ *Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law.*

Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.

[The “freedom of God’s grace” means freedom from fear of judgment, freedom from fear of eternal doom, freedom from fear of God’s anger and wrath, which the Law repeatedly engendered upon us. It also means freedom to act against our natural inclinations; freedom to say “yes” to God.]

¹⁵ *Well then, since God’s grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not!*

[Notice that the definition of *sin* has not changed; sin is still the violation of the Law. However, to live *under the Law* is to be judged by the Law; to live *under the grace* is to be judged by grace.]

¹⁶ *Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey?*

You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.

¹⁷ Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you.

¹⁸ Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.

¹⁹ Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this.

[The *weakness* to which Paul refers is our propensity to yield ourselves to the will of another. Beginning with Adam and Eve, until now, people behave slavishly to the will and ideas of other people. Even when we are leading others, we are not free from the whims of our flesh. That's why we call for systems of accountability—because of the recognized weakness of our human nature in us all.]

Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin.

Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy.

²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right.

²¹ And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom.

²² But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God.

Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.

Effect of Grace

“Free from the power of sin.” This is the effect of God's saving grace. Your body and mind have the capacity for sin, but you have been freed from its power to enslave. You have been redeemed. Your release as a free man or woman, leads you to *“do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.”*

Could I turn and do something else? Yes, but not without rebelling against the new nature Christ has given me.

To avoid this, and guide me successfully in the service of my new Master, Jesus Christ, God has given me, and you, His Holy Spirit.

Let me say again, under the Law, I was dependent on my flesh—my own knowledge, wisdom and strength—to achieve what was required of me.

Under grace, I am dependent on the Spirit—His knowledge, wisdom, and strength—to achieve what is required of me.

The Holy Spirit is my friend, who encourages me to do what is right.

The Holy Spirit is my strength, to resist temptation, especially when it is familiar or desirable, and to do what is right, especially when it is difficult.

The Holy Spirit is my coach, guiding me through the unfamiliar paths by which Jesus may lead me.

Human Weakness

Human nature is weak (and always will be), inclined to slavish thinking and behavior. That's why we're always searching for the "one thing" —a scientific discovery or philosophical realization—or the "one person"—a teacher, guru, or savior—that will produce a sense of rightness in our lives.

God our Creator has provided one Savior, Jesus Christ. *"There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

There is no other way to escape judgment. There is no other way to achieve lasting fulfillment. There is no other way to become right with God. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

In Jesus Christ, once and for all, God has condemned sin in the flesh. You cannot improve what God has condemned. It is pointless to try. You cannot improve it, but you can overcome it, by the grace of God, through the Spirit of God.

Paul, a servant chosen by God to take this Good News to many people, was beset by some problem—whether a physical infirmity or an emotional liability, it had a spiritual source: *"a messenger of Satan"* to torment him and keep him humble.

2 Corinthians 12:8 Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

God's power works *best* in our weakness, if only we will permit ourselves to be weak—in our own view and in the view of others.

Weakness feels like failure, which is why we tend to deny it—even to ourselves—and imagine we can hide it from God and others.

But weakness is NOT failure! Paul was weak, but he did not fail the Lord; he finished the race and kept the faith. Even Jesus was weak, and in His weakness He achieved our salvation!

Paul told the Corinthian Christians (2 Corinthians 13:4), *“Although [Jesus] was crucified in weakness, He now lives by the power of God.”*

Weakness is not a sin; it is our natural condition. And God works through it. In fact, He works through it very well! If we trust Him to do so.

Which Bible hero (other than Jesus) can you think of, who was not also a mess of worldly desires and carnal behaviors? Abraham? Moses? David? Solomon? Any of the apostles?

Do you think that was “by accident”? Did God fail to thoroughly vet them, before employing them? Or did He choose them *on purpose*, just as they were?

The implication of Paul’s words to the Corinthians is that we will always have our weakness, and we don’t need that to change, because God’s power works best in that condition. *“My power works best in weakness.”* Is that the truth? Do you believe that?

If so, then why do you struggle so to change it, and failing that, try to hide it? Stop and think about that.

Why do we spend so much effort, time, and money, trying to change the one condition that makes us prime candidates for the power of God?

Why can’t we—like Paul—take pleasure in our weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that we suffer for our faith?

Instead, we let the world squeeze us into its mold. We think we must be faster, smarter, richer—and live in constant competition to improve.

God spoke to Paul to tell him, *“My grace is all you need. It is sufficient. It is enough.”* Do we believe that?

Is it enough for you to know that God loves you—right now, just the way you are, with your weakness?

Can you relax and be free from anxiety, now that God has embraced you with grace?

Isn’t this why Jesus said (Matthew 6:31-33), *“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need”*?

Isn't this why Paul wrote (Philippians 4:6-7), *"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus"*?

Real Grace

Before I can further speak with you about what God's grace does *for* you, we must think about what God's grace asks *from* you.

Here is the first reality of living under grace: *trust God and love God as you are*. Do not wait until you become as you wish you were. Love and trust God today—right now—whatever your condition and circumstance.

If you do not trust Him now, you will not trust Him later either, because trust is built in layers, not all at once. Remember, Jesus said (Luke 16:10-12), *"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?"*

Jesus' application in that passage had to do with how we handle money, but the principle can also be applied to any other area of responsibility, such as trusting and obeying God. If we will not trust Him in the everyday things—watching your attitude, controlling your thought life, governing your words, and doing what is right—then we will not trust Him in the extraordinary things either.

Have you noticed, that life tends, year after year, toward increasing complexity? Therefore, the best time and place to begin actively trusting the Lord is today. (Yesterday would have been better, but tomorrow will be more challenging.)

Be honest with yourself. Do you trust God right now, with your present circumstances? What would need to change inside of you to thoroughly trust God right now?

Because the fact is that His grace toward you is enough. You don't need a better car, or a bigger house, or a better job, or more money, or a new spouse, or different children—in order to trust God and be satisfied. You're lying to yourself, if you think you do.

And God is unlikely to change your circumstances until you change your attitude.

Rest in your present weakness. Rejoice in your current troubles. Tell God that you trust Him and you will give Him praise, no matter what life dishes out to you.

God wants you to be happy—deeply happy. I want you to be happy, too. But you will never know such happiness while you blame God for not giving you more, or fixing what seems broken, or finding what is lost or missing. And while you may not SAY that God is to blame, you show that you think so when you grumble and complain, and are stingy with your thanks and praise, and get preoccupied with yourself instead of giving your life away.

Circumstances can never be the source of happiness that you imagine they are, because circumstances, like the wind, shift and change frequently.

You need a still point in this swirling world, and that still point is Jesus Christ. And you need to trust Him now—not someday. Put your trust in Him completely right now, just as things are, before even one thing changes.

Trust that His grace toward you is sufficient. Tell Him that if not one thing changes today, you trust Him—right now, just as it is—and you thank Him for His grace.

Yes, we have requests (still unfulfilled) before God's throne, and yes, we have loved ones who don't follow Jesus, and yes, people around the globe are in desperate need, but before even one thing changes, we need to express to the Father that we trust Him and will obey Him, regardless, because His grace is enough. The time to trust God is right now.