

(Basics) 21. Law and Grace

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon explores the transformative power of grace in contrast to the limitations of the law under the old covenant.

Duration: 12:49

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:11, Romans 6:14, 2 Corinthians 3:6, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 4:16

Topics: "Law And Grace", "New Covenant"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant, between law and grace. The verse in Romans 6:14 is highlighted as a concise statement that captures the essential difference between the two. The old covenant, represented by the law, was mediated through Moses and had its limitations, while the new covenant, represented by grace through Jesus, is far superior. The speaker uses the analogy of a bicycle and an airplane to illustrate the vast difference between the two covenants in terms of their ability to bring people to a higher standard of life and fellowship with God.

Transcript

We want to continue our study in trying to see the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant, between law and grace. This is so important, because if we don't know the difference, we will live at the low level that many Old Testament people lived in. God wants to lift us higher.

We want to look at a verse in Romans chapter 6 today, which I think puts in a nutshell, in a very brief sentence, the essential difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. There we read in Romans 6, in verse 14, Sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. The word law there symbolizes the old covenant and God's agreement with Israel, and the terms and conditions of that covenant are all included in that one word, law.

And grace, in one word, sums up God's new agreement through the Lord Jesus Christ, and all the terms and conditions of that new agreement. And here it says, you can be either under law or under grace. And the proof is this, when you are not under law, but under grace, sin cannot be master over you.

We could put it another way, that on the other hand, if you are not under grace, but under law, then sin will have the mastery over you. So ultimately, the way we discover whether we are under the law or under grace, is not by testing whether we are legalistic in relation to a lot of rules and regulations, but on the

other hand, by a far more deeper test. Does sin have the mastery over you? Or do you have the mastery over sin? This is a very, very important question, because a lot of people do not understand the difference between what Jesus has come to give and what Moses came to give under the old covenant.

Now if I were to ask you a simple question, who is greater, Moses or our Lord Jesus Christ? That's clear. Moses is a servant and the Lord Jesus is the master. It's so clear that Jesus is far greater than Moses.

Now let me tell you, since you understand that clearly, that the covenant or agreement that God mediated with Israel through Moses, is as inferior to the new covenant that God mediated through Jesus, as Moses is inferior to Jesus. The implication is that if Moses and the law could bring people in the Old Testament to a certain standard of life, Jesus and the new covenant should be able to bring them to what? To a higher standard or an equal standard? Of course, you'll say it has to be a higher standard. It would be something comparable to walking and flying, you know, to a bicycle and an aeroplane.

I mean, there's a lot of difference between a bicycle and an aeroplane. Both the speed and the ability to move from place to place. And if you can compare a bicycle with an aeroplane, there you see the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant.

The old covenant could also take you from one place to another, like a bicycle can. And the new covenant can take you from one place to another, like an aeroplane can. And there's a world of difference between the two.

The old covenant could bring a man to a certain point of fellowship with God, but not beyond that. And in the Old Testament tabernacle, God illustrated this by putting a thick curtain between the holy place and the most holy place. It was called the veil and told the Israelites, nobody can come into this most holy place.

This veil blocks you. You can come so far, but no further. You know, and beyond that veil, God Himself lived in that temple, Old Testament temple, and nobody could go there.

Even the high priest could go only once a year, and that was only as a token. But nobody could go there whenever they liked. But when Jesus died on Calvary, that veil was rent, torn from top to bottom, showing that the way into God's presence was open now.

So now let me ask you, now that the veil is torn and the way into the most holy place, into God's presence, is open, should our standard of life be higher or lower than people in the Old Testament? The answer is clear. If without personal fellowship with God, with just the law, people could come to a certain standard of life, how much higher our standard of life should be once we come into fellowship with God Himself inside the torn veil? And yet many, many Christians don't seem to have understood this. Why, for example, do we find or hear sometimes of Christians falling into some terrible sins? Can you imagine Elijah or John the Baptist running after women or running after money? No.

And yet they did not have grace. They did not have this open access into the most holy place like we have. And without it, they came to such a life.

How much more we can come to if only we would have faith and rise up to our privileges under the New Covenant? And that's what Paul is saying here, sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. Jesus once said in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 11, He said that even though John the Baptist was the greatest human being born up until that time, Matthew 11, verse 11, Jesus said that

the greatest human being born up until that day was John the Baptist. Of course, apart from himself, he was not born of a human father, so Jesus Himself is excluded.

But among all others, John the Baptist was the greatest. And then Jesus went on to say, But the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven, in God's kingdom, is greater even than that. What He was trying to say was that the highest that the law could take a man was still inferior or less than where grace could take the weakest of God's children.

So it's not going to be just an occasional believer who rises to a higher standard of life than John the Baptist. God's will is that every single one of His children who come under grace rise to a higher level than John the Baptist. But whether they will actually live that life is quite another thing.

That's quite another thing. But the possibility is there. If they understand and receive grace as God offers it to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, when we compare the word mercy, as we read, for example, in Hebrews 4, verse 16, we're told there that we are to come with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. And as I mentioned in a previous study, there is a difference between mercy and grace. Mercy is essentially an Old Testament word.

It's a word which you find very frequently in the Old Testament. The Lord whose mercy endures forever. And David often speaks about it.

And as a result of that mercy, people in the Old Testament had their sins covered and forgiven. They could not be cleansed. David could only say, blessed is the man whose sins are covered.

Nobody's sins could be cleansed until Jesus died on Calvary's cross. But they could be covered until Christ came. They were forgiven.

That well-known psalm, Psalm 103, David says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquities. That was mercy. And all of us need it, too.

We need mercy. We need our sins to be forgiven. But there is something more that we have in the New Covenant.

And that is grace. Something more than mercy. Something to help us in the future.

Something to help us overcome the passions in our nature. And it says here, we can come to the throne of grace in the same place where we received mercy. We can find grace to help us in our time of need.

Now, what is our time of need? Our time of need is when we are under tremendous pressure from the lusts in our flesh, tremendous pressure from the devil to sin. And in that moment, when we are tempted to sin and to fall, God says, Grace can help me. Grace is help.

Help for my need, whatever it is. If my need right now is that I need help to overcome a particular sin, it says, Grace can help me in my time of need. It's like if I were climbing a mountain and I'm about to slip and fall.

If I ask for help, God can lift me up and make me stand so that I don't fall. But if I don't ask for help and I struggle on my own, I slip and fall and break my bones and then I ask God for help. And an ambulance

comes and picks me up.

Well, that's help too, but that's mercy. That's after I have fallen that God picks me up, forgives me, takes me to hospital, patches me up and restores me. Now, that's the experience of many Christians.

They fall, then they ask God for help. But isn't there a better way? There is. Grace to help me in my time of need.

Now, why don't you do this next time, when you find the pressure of temptation so strong that you're about to fall. Try this out and see if it doesn't work. You ask God at that moment, say, Lord, I'm not able to overcome this.

I want you to help me. Give me help, grace to overcome this. And you will see in that moment, grace coming to carry you through.

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