



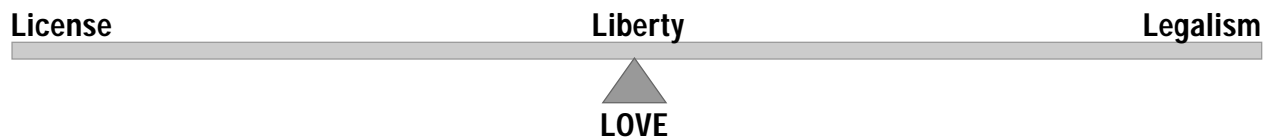
## The Grace Life

What is the Grace Life? It is the Christian life as God intended it. It is a life of freedom to live as a child of God. It is living the Christian life consistent with grace. Not only is grace the basis of our initial salvation (justification), it is also the basis of our growth (sanctification). By God's grace we are born into His family and by God's grace we are free to grow as His children. Unfortunately, this life of liberty can be lost unless we stand firm in grace.

### **The balance: Liberty controlled by love**

God intends that Christians enjoy the liberty we have gained through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Christ fulfilled the law and set us free from bondage to it (Gal. 4:4-7). He also set us free from the tyranny and power of sin (Rom. 6:14). We are not to use our freedom to serve ourselves, but we are to use our freedom to serve God and others. Love is the controlling principle that constrains the proper and godly use of our freedom (Gal. 5:13-14).

Two extremes can pervert God's grace for living the Christian life into an unhealthy, even disastrous, imitation of the true Grace Life. These perversions of Christian liberty are noted in Scripture. We call one license, the other legalism. Living by either extreme throws the Christian's life of liberty into imbalance.



### **One extreme: License**

The first extreme, license, is the abuse of grace to serve oneself selfishly and sinfully. It is an unrestrained life that scorns God's commands. The Christian who falls into license may reason that he can indulge in sin because his eternal salvation can't be lost, or because he is forgiven already, or at least, he rationalizes, "God will forgive me when I sin." This is the immature attitude behind the objections noted in Romans 6:1 and 6:15. There, the questions are raised, should we sin to experience more grace and because we are not under the law? The answer is, absolutely not! In Christ, we have died to sin and should serve a new Master, Jesus Christ.

Though we are not under the old Mosaic law, we have many New Testament commands to obey, chief among them is to love God and to love our neighbor, both of which preclude self-serving and sinful behavior. The licentious Christian fails to realize how he or she is despising grace and how such conduct forfeits fellowship with God in this life as well as benefits in eternity, and invites God's disciplinary action.

### **Another extreme: Legalism**

The Grace Life can not only be perverted by license, it can also be perverted by legalism. Legalism is the abuse of grace that seeks to bring Christians either back under the Mosaic law or



some artificial standard for acceptance with God that has been created by others. The legalist insists on following a list of do's and don'ts such as those which seem to be behind the warnings in Galatians (4:9-10; 5:1-3) and Colossians (2:16-23). Legalistic Christians can easily fall under the expectations of others that make them feel guilty falsely. For example, they can be made to feel that they are not spiritual because of what Bible translation they use, how they dress, what they eat or don't eat, what movies they see, what music they listen to, what church meetings they do or don't attend—or any other issue which the Bible does not address directly.

What the legalist fails to realize is that Jesus not only set us free from the Old Testament law (Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6; Gal. 3:13; 4:4-7) but He also set us free from artificial man-made standards that are not in the Bible. We are accepted by God because we are His children by grace (Gal. 4:7). We stand accepted by grace (Rom. 5:1-2) and are thus secured by His grace until the time that we see Him (Rom. 8:29-39). Since every believer is accepted on the basis of grace we should accept other believers who differ on issues not clearly defined as right or wrong in the Bible (Romans 14). The legalist has “fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4) in that he now relies on his own performance to complete his relationship with God. What he doesn't understand is that he must always perform perfectly or he is condemned by his own standard, whatever it is. Only Jesus Christ's perfect performance is acceptable to God, and therefore, only Christians who trust in that gracious provision are acceptable to God. The way to please God and live up to the standards of the law is to love (Gal. 5:14).

### **Conclusion**

We must be careful to balance our Christian living on the principle of grace from beginning to end. The same grace extended to us at initial salvation assures us of growth and acceptance with God in our Christian life. We are free from sin, the law, and artificial rules and thus also from condemnation. But our freedom must be restrained by love for God and others. That produces the Grace Life that pleases God.

Flee the dangerous perversions of license and legalism. Instead, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free” (Gal. 5:1).