

A week ago I had a **dream** about a long table display. On it there were **all sorts of of animals**. Sort of reminds me of a dream Peter had doesn't it. What was **startling noticeable** however was that all these various animals, both predators and prey alike, were **all living in total peace, harmony and love** for each other. **Strange** huh? Or maybe more **like a preview**?

For sin will not have dominion over you. For you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

No longer under the Law, so **what happened?** What does that actually mean? **Did the Law disappear** once grace took over, or **did anything at all happen to it?**

The truth is that the **Law did not lose its intended function** as a **descriptor**, but as a **dictator**.

We are no longer **under the Law as the authority or source of being righteous**. That has **never been true** nor will it ever be so. The Law was **never intended to be a source** of living righteous but **only a reference** to inform everyone what it looks like. It is **our perception** that **has to change**.

The Law was never meant to be a means of becoming right with God but **only is there to describe** what a person's **life looks like** when living in normal connection to the One who alone is righteous.

It was **sin that mis-defined the Law** making it out to be a **dictator demanding compliance**. That was never God's intent. While the **Law is just and good** and **never changes**, misappropriating its purpose is something sin has done, not God.

The **Law never loses its legitimacy** but rather is **restored to its original legitimate design intent**.

What does **living under grace** mean? How do we **define** the very word 'grace'?

Living **under grace** too often has been **hijacked** to also mean something it was never intended to mean, just as the meaning of Law was distorted.

Grace is **not an excuse** or permission slip for **indulging in sin** because we are forgiven.

Grace is **not** even an **exemption from living righteously** as the Law describes.

*Neither present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin will not have dominion over you. For you are not under law, but under grace. What then? **Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? May it never be!** Don't you know that to whom you **present yourselves as servants** to obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether **of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?** But thanks be to God, that, whereas you were bondservants of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered. Being made free from sin, you became bondservants of righteousness.* (Romans 6:13-18)

Particularly note the **parallels** in this passage that actually define the terms.

Under **Law** = servants to **sin**

Under **Grace** = servants to **obedience**

Why is **obedience synonymous with grace** here? Most people associate **obedience with the Law!**

Grace is an atmosphere, better described as gracious or **graciousness**. It is a **disposition**, not an exemption or pardon or excuse.

Graciousness inspires spontaneous obedience awakened by love, **admiration** and **desire** for intimate closeness with the One who **loves us so graciously and passionately and kindly**.

Graciousness invites and **inspires rather than commands**; it **draws rather than drives**.

Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4 NRSV)

Rich kindness literally **defines the essence of graciousness**. That's what **living under grace** means!

This is the very heart of what the Bible calls gospel – good news! It focuses on kindness rather than legal obligation. The **Law can only describe it**, but **kindness alone can reproduce it free of fear**.

Graciousness awakens longings for full **restoration** to deep **intimacy, satisfaction and joy**.

But **grace** can go **beyond awakening longings** – it provides **enablement** and **increases capacity**.

Engaging our will to believe in God's graciousness allows Him to transform our entire being.

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God**, which is your **spiritual worship**. Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your minds**, so that **you may discern what is the will of God** – what is **good and acceptable and perfect**. For **by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to **think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith** that God has assigned.*** (Romans 12:1-3 NRSV)

Graciousness, kindness, compassion, unconditional love and favor is the **fulfillment of the Law**.

*For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not give false testimony," "You shall not covet," and whatever other commandments there are, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love doesn't harm a neighbor. **Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.*** (Romans 13:9-10)

That long **table full** of diametrically opposed, **normally antagonistic** animals **living together in love** and kindness with each other – that was literally an **example of the power of love and graciousness** – the **gospel!** Those animals were **obeying the Law**, and they can't even read it. And how could that happen? Because that is the **most natural thing** to do when the **atmosphere of graciousness abounds** and surrounds.

*But **law came in**, with the **result** that the **trespass multiplied**; but where **sin increased, grace abounded all the more**, so that, just as **sin exercised dominion in death**, so **grace might also exercise dominion through justification** leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Romans 5:20-21 NRSV)