

"THREE GRACE RELATED PRINCIPLES"

(Romans 14:1-12)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Paul reflected the desire of Jesus that congregations become havens of grace, places where people have the freedom to be who they are and to become what God desires—according to His plan and along His timetable. I find in Romans 14:1-12 three principles of grace that would transform every church if the members took them to heart.

First, *a life of grace begins with mutual acceptance*. Accepting another doesn't require us to agree with him or her. We can respectfully disagree with ideas or opinions without rejecting the person who holds them. Acceptance takes the other person seriously and gives his or her perspective the benefit of consideration. Acceptance leaves lots of room for differing preferences. One person's taste in music, food, art, and other matters of personal liking might be vastly different from yours or others. Acceptance delights in the delight of another. Acceptance allows another person the opportunity to be different without judgment, takes the time to understand him or her, and extends the benefit of the doubt.

Acceptance allows others to feel safe in being who they are, even when their poor behavior must be reprovved or their opinions challenged. There are times that we must confront error; the Bible commands it. And sometimes godly confrontation leads to separation. It isn't pleasant, but it's right. When certain convictions are clearly established in Scripture and maintaining a relationship requires those convictions to be compromised, something has to give. In this difficult circumstance, Scripture must stand and the relationship must give.

Acceptance does not require truth to be set aside or sin to be ignored. Acceptance merely calls for truth and love to guide our relationships.

Second, *an attitude of grace requires releasing others to be who God wants them to be*. This is simply releasing someone who has harmed me to answer to God for his or her actions, leaving matters of justice and mercy in the Lord's hands, and trusting that He will do with that person what is best for all concerned. In other words, an attitude of grace is refusing to become



someone else's Holy Spirit! We can confront with loving firmness (Matt. 18:15-17), but we must release the offender to be directed by God.

We all must stand before God to answer for our own choices. We will not be asked to comment on the behavior of another. An attitude of grace allows this truth to become the foundation of our relationships with others, especially those who cause us harm.

Third, a commitment to grace forbids anyone to become the judge of another. I cannot become someone else's judge, because I do not possess the qualifications required for the position. Three reasons come to mind:

1. I am not omniscient, so I cannot know all the facts. I must have all the facts if I am to judge correctly, but I barely know enough to make wise decisions concerning my own life, to say nothing of someone else's.
2. I cannot be completely objective. I am biased. I am selfish. I am finite. I cannot see the big picture. When God makes decisions, each choice takes every factor in the universe into account. I cannot do that because of my own sinfulness and my limited mind.
3. I can condemn, but I cannot redeem. When God confronts sin, He always offers a means of redemption. Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead to make redemption possible. The Holy Spirit can convict sin and then transform a soul. The Father offers hope after someone has failed. My condemnation, on the other hand, offers nothing but rejection.

Imagine the spiritual oasis these three principles of grace could create if we allowed them to guide our relationships. How delightfully refreshing would our homes and churches become if people were freely accepted, allowed to live beyond the exacting expectations of others, and judged only by God, whose judgment is always wrapped in understanding and love? How much more productive would the office become if the boss maintained high standards of excellence yet managed according to the principles of grace?

There's only one way to know: begin applying grace-related principles wherever you live and work.